

SECRETARY-GENERAL MESSAGE

Message of United Nations Secretary-General, António Guterres, on the International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking

26 June 2017

Last year, at the UN General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Problem (UNGASS), the international community took steps to mobilize a multifaceted, collective response to the full range of issues related to drug abuse and illicit trafficking. Governments came together to chart a new path forward that is more effective and humane, and leaves no one behind.

UNGASS was a ground-breaking moment that provided a detailed and forward-looking blueprint for action. Together, we must honour the unanimous commitments made to reduce drug abuse, illicit trafficking and the harm that drugs cause, and to ensure that our approach promotes equality, human rights, sustainable development, and greater peace and security.

I know from personal experience how an approach based on prevention and treatment can yield positive results. As Prime Minister of Portugal, I used the flexibility afforded by the three international drug control conventions to introduce non-criminal responses to the possession of drugs for personal use. Greater resources were allocated to prevention, treatment, and social reintegration programs, including harm reduction measures.

Portugal now has one of the lowest death rates for drug use in Europe. In 2001, Portugal had the highest rate of HIV amongst injecting drug users in the region; since the introduction of the new policy, this rate, and rates of all sexually transmitted diseases, have decreased dramatically. Overall drug use rates have also fallen.

I am proud of these results and hope this experience will contribute to the discussion and encourage Member States to continue exploring comprehensive and evidence-based solutions.

The UNGASS follow-up process provides us with an institutional framework to learn from each other and share best practices. It is vital that we examine the effectiveness of the War on Drugs approach, and its consequences for human rights.

Despite the risks and challenges inherent in tackling this global problem, I hope and believe we are on the right path, and that together we can implement a coordinated, balanced and comprehensive approach that leads to sustainable solutions.

This would be the best possible way to implement the UNGASS recommendations and to have a positive impact on the lives of millions of people around the world.