



2024 UN Civil Society Conference (UNON), Kenya

Expression of interest for written statements

If you wish to submit written inputs to be shared with the conference leadership, please submit a brief statement on the thematic topics listed below.

Chapeau: Human Rights and Gender Equality

Submit your written statement on the chapeau, including key issues, work undertaken, and inputs you feel will enhance the UN Civil Society Conference.

- + Youth RISE (Resources, Information, Support and Education) is a global network of young people who use drugs or who have been impacted by drug policies centered on the “war on drugs” approach. We mobilize youth to engage in full-spectrum harm reduction and drug policy reform to promote health and human rights and contribute to the achievement of sustainable development goals. As stated in the International Guidelines on Human Rights and Drug Policy¹, produced by UNDP, WHO and UNAIDS in 2019, responding to issues connected with drug use and the illicit drug trade is one of the greatest health and social policy challenges of our time. All aspects of this challenge have human rights implications. The ‘unintended consequences’ (UNODC, 2009) of punitive drug control policies have negative impacts, particularly affecting youth, young key populations, Indigenous peoples, women, and racialized communities.

What key reforms related to the chapeau do you want to see as an outcome of the Summit of and Pact for the Future?

Youth RISE would like to put special emphasis on the need for State parties to acknowledge the intersectionality of drug policy with other fields, aiming for the promotion of policy coherence within their national legal systems. This means reforming laws and policies that, together with drug policies, prevent young people from accessing healthcare, non-coerced or forced treatment, harm reduction, and other services based on age, identity, or other status, which ultimately act as barriers to their right to health. The latest UNAIDS [data](#)² highlights that many countries still have restrictive laws and policies surrounding the “age of consent”, which prohibits access to sexual and reproductive health rights, harm reduction, and related services. Such limitations unleash harmful outcomes in various aspects of young people’s lives. For instance, an estimated 250,000 Adolescent Girls and Young Women (AGYW) contracted HIV in 2021, with 82% of them from Sub-Saharan Africa. Such numbers might indicate the reason why adolescent girl schooling completion

¹ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). International Guidelines on Human Rights and Drug Policy. UNDP, [March 2019].

² The path that ends AIDS: UNAIDS Global AIDS Update 2023. Geneva: Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS; 2023. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.

rates remain low, with only 44% completing lower secondary school and 26% completing higher secondary school. Following UNAIDS recommendations and the 10-10-10 targets in the UNAIDS strategy, State parties should reform such laws to remove inherent biases. This includes removing punitive laws that criminalize sex work, drug use, LGBTQ+ identities, and gender-affirming care.

Chapter 1: Sustainable Development and Financing for Development

Submit your written statement on the chapter, including key issues, work undertaken, and inputs you feel will enhance the UN Civil Society Conference.

It is essential to address policy coherence for sustainable development. Advancing sustainable development requires a focus on synergies through systemic approaches that consider interlinkages of human-planetary systems and subsystems. Policymaking should integrate economic, social, and environmental dimensions, considering cross-boundary spillover effects. [Policy coherence](#)³ for sustainable development goes beyond "doing no harm" and aims at "doing good" by maximizing synergies and mitigating trade-offs. It emphasizes multi-sectoral linkages, multi-actor partnerships, and institutional and governance mechanisms to achieve sustainable development goals.

Here, we highlight the case of drug policy and the vast international evidence that exposes [its links to achieving the SDG goals](#)⁴. Drug control [intersects](#)⁵ with [much](#)⁶ of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Data has shown us that the current [war on drugs](#)⁷ approach is a war on people and a key driver of violence, organised crime, corruption and state capture in ecologically fragile regions. It leads to harmful environmental impacts, particularly in countries where illegal drug production is carried out. Reforming the international approach to drugs is not only relevant to the cause of climate justice but an [essential part](#)⁸ of the solution.

³ Rafaella Ferraz Ziegert. "Doing No Harm, Doing Good: Why Policy Coherence and Systems Thinking Matter," United Nations System Staff College (UNSSC), [11 April, 2023], <https://www.unssc.org/news-and-insights/blog/doing-no-harm-doing-good-why-policy-coherence-and-systems-thinking-matter>.

⁴ Health Poverty Action, "SDGs and Drugs: A Policy Briefing". Health Poverty Action, [November 2015]), https://www.unodc.org/documents/ungass2016/Contributions/Civil/Health_Poverty_Action/HPA_SDGs_drugs_policy_briefing_WEB.pdf.

⁵ Tinasti, K., Bém, P., Grover, A., Kazatchkine, M. D., & Dreifuss, R. (2015). SDGs will not be achieved without drug policy reform. *The Lancet*, 386(9999), 1132. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736\(15\)00198-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736(15)00198-1)

⁶ Global Commission on Drug Policy. *Drug Policy And The Sustainable Development Agenda: Position Paper*. Geneva: Global Commission on Drug Policy, 2018. https://www.globalcommissionondrugs.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2018SDG_ENG_web.pdf.

⁷ Global Commission on Drug Policy. *War on Drugs*. Geneva: Global Commission on Drug Policy, June, 2011. https://www.globalcommissionondrugs.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/GCDP_WaronDrugs_EN.pdf.

⁸ Health Poverty Action, "Revealing the Missing Link to Climate Justice: Drug Policy" (Health Poverty Action, 2023), <https://www.healthpovertyaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/REPORT-Revealing-the-Missing-Link-to-Climate-Justice-Drug-Policy.pdf>.

What key reforms related to chapter 1 do you want to see as an outcome of the Summit of and Pact for the Future?

Member States should prioritise the funding, development and implementation of comprehensive, accessible and youth-friendly HIV prevention, testing and treatment services for young people who use drugs. They should also acknowledge the importance of and ensure funding for harm reduction services as critical responses to solve the overdose crisis impacting a growing list of countries. Such measure is aligned to the resolution [L.5/Rev.2](#) titled “Preventing and responding to drug overdose through prevention, treatment, care, and recovery measures as well as other public health interventions to address the harms associated with illicit drug use as part of a balanced, comprehensive, scientific evidence-based approach”, adopted during the 67th meeting of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs in Vienna, in March 2024.

Harm reduction services are effective and cost-effective, saving lives and government funds. However, these services are severely underfunded. At the domestic and international levels, funding for harm reduction is inadequate and shrinking. \$100 billion is spent on global drug law enforcement every year, but just \$131 million is spent on harm reduction. This means that countries spend more than 750 times the amount on punitive responses than they do on life-saving services for people who use drugs.

Not only are punitive responses ineffective at reducing drug use and sale, but they also drive the stigmatisation of people who use drugs, leading to discrimination and poor health outcomes for individuals and communities.

[Research](#) by Harm Reduction International (2023) shows that the redirection of just 7.5% of the funds currently spent on drug law enforcement towards health-based responses to drug use, such as opioid agonist therapy, needle and syringe programs, could: 1) Almost entirely end AIDS among people who inject drugs; 2) Prevent viral hepatitis among people who use drugs; 3) Save thousands of lives by giving Naloxone (a medicine which reverses opioid overdoses) to first responders, family, and community members, 4) Improve the health of people who use drugs in prisons and detention centres by providing harm reduction services in those settings.

Moreover, the criminalization of drug use and possession for personal use in at least 145 countries, along with stigma, discrimination and violence, continues to restrict both the provision of and access to life-saving harm reduction services. Countries should follow recommendations by UNAIDS, WHO and OHCHR and decriminalise drug use and possession for personal use, ensuring better health and development outcomes for future generations.

Chapter 2: International peace and security

Submit your written statement on the chapter, including key issues, work undertaken, and inputs you feel will enhance the UN Civil Society Conference.

UNODC's World Drug Report 2023 included a chapter focusing on the environmental impacts of drug trafficking, taking the Amazon Basin as a case study. It deserves to be highlighted how the local criminal trend in the Amazon basin is also, in part, the result of security responses to criminal networks. The strengthening of gangs after zero-tolerance security policies is not a phenomenon exclusive to the Brazilian context. Across Latin America, the approach brought disastrous side effects and proved to be counterproductive in several experiences, such as in the case of El Salvador and Honduras. Such examples provide clarity that the incarceration of leaders and high-profile members of criminal networks does not achieve the aim of reducing drug crime in the long term. Therefore the harmful impact of such approaches far outweighs the desired successes that underlie such approaches.

Studies have shown that the current "War on Drugs" contributes to the "professionalisation" of crime, the overpopulation of the prison system, and the spread of gang presence. It also leads to the escalation and banalisation of violence, justified by the "war on crime", which fosters the image of gang members as "warriors". Moreover, it feeds grievances among gang members, police force and civil society, undermining possibilities of building peaceful agreements (Barbosa, 2017; Erez, 2013; Fernandes, 2013; Zaluar, 2012; Guerardi, 2011; Rivera 2010).

The World Drug Report 2023 showed how violence levels are consistently rising in the region, and this is fueled by both illegal drug trades and zero-tolerance security responses. Indeed, it is mentioned how cities in the Amazon basin have homicide rates per capita higher than national averages. A study developed by the Institute of Applied Economic Research published in June 2023 during the Public Security Forum in Brazil estimated that each Brazilian has a 4.2-month reduction in their life expectancy due to the effects of the war on drugs. The sum of all lifetimes lost due to drug-related homicides amounts to 1.14 million years. The same study also calculated that the country loses at least 50 billion reais (210 million dollars) per year as a result of the prohibition of drug use and repression of trafficking.

What key reforms related to chapter 2 do you want to see as an outcome of the Summit of and Pact for the Future?

Member States to prioritise evidence-based public health and human rights approaches for drug policies. In alignment with SDG 3 and SDG 4, youth-friendly and evidence-based drug education ought to be recognised and supported as crucial components of public health policy at schools and in communities. Scare tactics must be abandoned, and access to quality drug education that benefits youth as a whole must be implemented and accessible. Policies should shift their focus away from criminalisation toward peer-led drug education, prevention, harm reduction, treatment, and social integration services.

Alternatives to punitive law enforcement, such as the decriminalisation of drug use, possession, and sharing, as well as legal regulation models, must be considered to reduce harm from unregulated drug markets, according to scientific evidence, UN guidance, and countries' human rights obligations, including the UNDRIP and the UNCRPD.

The development of further detailed guidance from multiple relevant UN Agencies (OHCHR, UNICEF, and UNODC), after meaningful engagement with civil society, to outline drug policies that protect all rights of the child and/or cause the least harm to children overall.

Member States should take action to divert young people from the criminal justice system and refrain from the arrest, detention or imprisonment of a child or young person, in line with the UN CRC, the Beijing Rules and the Havana Rules.

Chapter 3: Science, Technology and Innovation and Digital Cooperation

Submit your written statement on the chapter, including key issues, work undertaken, and inputs you feel will enhance the UN Civil Society Conference.

The use of drones and AI technology to combat illicit drug markets brings risks to people who use drugs, and particularly young people, representing a violation of their right to privacy (Universal Declaration on Human Rights art. 12)

As a youth-led and youth-focused organization, we stand at the intersection of technology, innovation, and advocacy, championing the rights and potential of young people, including young people who use drugs, who are navigating through the complexities of the digital age. We recognize that young people are not just consumers of digital technology but are innate innovators capable of leveraging science, technology, and innovation (STI) to solve global challenges and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The rapid advancement of the digital world, transforming societies into a global village, brings forth the critical role of STI in fostering sustainable development and addressing inherent challenges. Despite the opportunities, there exists a pressing need for digital literacy among young people who use drugs, especially those lost in the crosshairs of intersecting identities such as refugees, migrants, and members of the LGBTQ+ community. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown the urgency of integrating digital literacy and innovation into our responses to health and social crises, demonstrating the potential of online platforms to deliver essential services, [including harm reduction for people who use drugs](#).

Our organization has pioneered workshops and initiatives that engage and capacitate young people who use drugs to navigate and contribute to the digital divide positively. We have harnessed online platforms to extend harm reduction services across Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, Latin America, and Europe, reaching populations that are traditionally harder to engage.

What key reforms related to chapter 3 do you want to see as an outcome of the Summit of and Pact for the Future?

In light of our experiences and the evolving global landscape, we propose the following key reforms to be adopted as outcomes of the Summit and Pact for the Future:

Investment in Youth-Centric Digital Literacy and Innovation: Member States must prioritize the development and implementation of digital literacy programs that cater specifically to the diverse needs of young people, including those with drug use experience. This

encompasses the safe and responsible use of digital technologies for health, education, and social connectivity.

Protection of Digital Rights and Privacy: The use of drones, AI technology, and other surveillance measures in combating illicit drug markets should be carefully regulated to protect the rights to privacy and personal security of young people who use drugs. Human rights must remain at the core of all STI interventions, ensuring that technological advancements do not infringe upon fundamental freedoms.

Integration of Harm Reduction Services into Digital Platforms: We urge Member States to support the integration of harm reduction services into online platforms, recognizing the potential of digital innovation to enhance the accessibility and effectiveness of health services. This approach is particularly crucial for bypassing stigmatization and for reaching young, marginalized populations and should be supported through funding, policy reforms, and international cooperation.

Promotion of Youth Innovation in STI: Encourage and support the participation of young people in STI fields, including those from marginalized communities. This can be achieved by providing platforms for youth innovation, funding youth-led tech projects, and integrating their perspectives in policy-making processes related to technology and digital cooperation.

Ethical Frameworks for Technology Use in Drug Policy: Develop and implement ethical frameworks for the application of new technologies in drug policy, ensuring they are used to support harm reduction and public health objectives rather than punitive measures.

As we move towards a future where digital cooperation and innovation play increasingly central roles, it is imperative that we ensure these advancements are inclusive, rights-based, and supportive of all young people's health and well-being. We look forward to contributing to the discussions at the UN Civil Society Conference and collaborating with Member States and other stakeholders to realize these reforms.

Chapter 4: Youth and Future Generations

Submit your written statement on the chapter, including key issues, work undertaken, and inputs you feel will enhance the UN Civil Society Conference.

As highlighted during a multi-stakeholder consultation organised by [UNODC](#), [UNICEF](#), [WHO](#), [INPUD](#) and [Youth RISE](#), in November 2023, young people who use drugs are systematically and negatively impacted by the consequences of punitive and criminalising drug policies. A robust body of international evidence shows us that [current policies are failing⁹](#) to address drug-related matters, and the most impacted are the future generations.

⁹ International Drug Policy Consortium (IDPC), Off Track: December 2023 Shadow Report For The Mid-Term Review Of The 2019 Ministerial Declaration On Drugs. (IDPC. December, 2023), <https://idpc.net/publications/2023/12/idpc-shadow-report-2024>.

Young people are using [more drugs](#)¹⁰ compared with previous generations. At the same time, they are the most harmed by the negative results of punitive policies.

They face discrimination and barriers in accessing essential health services, which violates their right to health. They also deal with criminalisation, which brings life-long consequences that curb their development opportunities. For instance, the [OHCHR's report](#)¹¹ on human rights challenges in addressing and countering all aspects of the world drug problem, published in September 2023, showed how random mandatory drug testing in school settings and expulsion from education for drug use violates young people's rights to accessing education.

The COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated existing challenges for young people, underscoring the need for their representation in public institutions. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union's [report](#)¹² on Youth Participation in National Parliaments (2021), the global proportion of Members of Parliament aged under 30 has increased to 2.6% in recent years. While this represents a positive trend, it remains insufficient given that 50% of the world's population falls under this age group. Youth quotas have proven effective in increasing youth representation, similar to gender parity quotas. Evidence indicates that well-designed youth quotas, similar to gender parity quotas, can further enhance youth representation.

What key reforms related to chapter 4 do you want to see as an outcome of the Summit of and Pact for the Future?

To abide by the [2030 Agenda](#)¹³'s core principle of leaving no one behind, the text of the Pact for the Future must include practical steps to systematically include future generations, especially marginalised groups, in our decision-making. It must put into practice measures that acknowledge and respond to the 'wicked problems' of our times. That means recognising the interconnections of diverse issues and the need for collaboration across different sectors in the crafting of policy solutions.

Based on the aforementioned points, we urge member states to:

1) Recognise Young People's Right to Health: Member states should recognise that laws and policies preventing young people from accessing healthcare and other services based on age, identity, or other status act as barriers to their right to health and must be removed. This includes removing punitive laws that criminalise sex work, drug use, LGBTQ+ identities, and gender-affirming care and engaging communities in inclusive processes for decriminalisation, legalisation, and regulation.

2) Empower Young People as Leaders and Partners: The political declaration should acknowledge and support young people as leaders and partners of Agenda 2030. Member

¹⁰ UNODC, World Drug Report 2023 (United Nations publication, 2023).

https://www.unodc.org/res/WDR-2023/Special_Points_WDR2023_web_DP.pdf.

¹¹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. A/HRC/54/53: Human rights challenges in addressing and countering all aspects of the world drug problem. OHCHR. 15 August 2023.

<https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G23/156/03/PDF/G2315603.pdf?OpenElement>.

¹² Inter-Parliamentary Union. Youth participation in national parliaments. Geneva: Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2021. <https://www.ipu.org/youth2021>.

¹³United Nations, "Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" (Geneva: United Nations, 2015),

<https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N15/291/89/PDF/N1529189.pdf?OpenElement>.

states should back this recognition with adequate funding for youth-led interventions to achieve SDG 3.3 and other sustainable development goals.

3) Include Language and Support for Adolescents in all their Diversity: It is crucial to ensure that the political declaration includes specific language addressing the unique issues faced by adolescents and young people in all their diversity. Member states must commit to providing adequate holistic support during their critical life changes.

4) Promote Youth Representation and Participation: Member states should place a strong emphasis on civil society and youth engagement. This includes encouraging the inclusion of youth in their delegations, providing opportunities for young people to speak in national and international fora, and allocating specific slots for civil society to address the assembly alongside member states. We urge governments to mainstream the perspectives of organisations representing young key populations (i.e. young people living with HIV and young people who use drugs).

5) Encourage and support data collection in collaboration with academia and civil society: National data collection must also be improved to yield an accurate picture of challenges on the ground and utilise the research conducted by the scientific community and civil society actors.

6) Use evidence to inform sustainable and effective funding allocation: Funding must be equitably allocated to evidence-based services accessible to all people - particularly young key populations.

Chapter 5: Transforming Global Governance

Submit your written statement on the chapter, including key issues, work undertaken, and inputs you feel will enhance the UN Civil Society Conference.

As [highlighted](#)¹⁴ in the preparatory briefing for the [Summit of the Future](#), the UN System can better support Member States in achieving the SDGs by adopting cultural and skills transformation in the UN System entities. Multilateral, long-term focused and inclusive decision-making at the global level consciously avoids foreseeable harms and safeguards the interests of future generations.

That is why the Summit of the Future must aim to reform counterproductive policies and international approaches. The Pact for the Future must acknowledge and foresee actions towards the [UN 2.0](#)¹⁵, which upgrades expertise in innovation, data, digital, foresight, and behavioural science to enhance UN System results and help build similar Member State expertise to accelerate shared progress towards the SDGs.

What key reforms related to chapter 5 do you want to see as an outcome of the Summit of and Pact for the Future?

Full review of the three international drug control conventions with the meaningful participation of affected groups; applying an intersectional lens to decolonise the treaties and

¹⁴ United Nations, "Our Common Agenda: Summit of the Future, What Would It Deliver?" (Geneva: United Nations, 2023), <https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/our-common-agenda-summit-of-the-future-what-would-it-deliver.pdf>.

¹⁵ United Nations, "UN 2.0 Policy Brief" (United Nations, September, 2023), https://www.un.org/two-zero/sites/default/files/2023-09/UN-2.0_Policy-Brief_EN.pdf.

elevate the perspectives of those most harmed by the international drug control regime; including but not limited to children, young people, people who use drugs, people living with HIV, disabled and neurodivergent people, and Indigenous peoples; in the spirit of centring the health and wellbeing of all humankind on addressing the world drug situation.

Member States, through the UNODC, should prioritise the promotion of communities' health and human rights when addressing the world drug situation. This includes, but is not limited to, stipulating drug policy and programmes in line with UNDRIP, UNCRPD, the UN CRC, the Human Rights Council Resolution 52/24., the UN System Common Position, as well as adopting measures that positively contribute to the aims outlined in the UN's 2030 Youth Strategy and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.