



Youth RISE Plenary Statement at the 69th CND 2026

Chair, distinguished delegates,

I speak on behalf of Youth RISE, an international network of young people who use drugs and young people affected by drug policies. We advocate for evidence-based, rights-centred approaches that prioritise young people's health and well-being, while addressing the structural conditions that shape our vulnerability.

Discussions about drugs almost always start from the same place: "How do we protect young people?"

But there is another question we urgently need to ask: ***What does real protection look like in our lives?***

On the 9th of March, the Human Rights Council in Geneva observed the Annual Day on the Rights of the Child, focusing on "the human rights violations of children in armed conflict."

In many parts of the world, militarized efforts to curb organized crime and drug trafficking lead to armed clashes that place children and young people at greater risk of experiencing direct violence **from both criminal groups and the law enforcement sent to dismantle them.**

Police raids profile and criminalize youth in low-income communities and feed into stigma and discrimination that have lifelong consequences. During these operations, young people cannot freely walk in the streets, go to school, or reach healthcare facilities - and these disruptions can last for days.

Resolution 68/6, which established the independent expert panel, calls for consultations with a broad range of stakeholders, including youth. As part of a project led by the Global Commission on Drug Policy, Youth RISE conducted consultations with young people in diverse regions to understand how drug policies shape their lives, rights, and access to care. We are turning these findings into evidence-based recommendations in a policy brief to be released in April. We grounded this work in international human rights frameworks – especially the Convention on the Rights of the Child – and ensured that children's and young people's perspectives guided the analysis and the recommendations.

Ten years ago, the UNGASS carried the slogan "A better tomorrow for today's youth." We ask Member States: was that merely a slogan, or did it lead to meaningful action? Do the laws implemented since then reduce stigma and violence, or do they drive them?



Real protection for children and young people cannot be measured by drug seizure numbers, but by whether young people – **including young people who use drugs – are safer, healthier, and freer.**

We urge Member States to apply the principle of “do no harm” across all policies that concern youth, recognising meaningful youth participation, harm reduction, and the protection of rights as non-negotiable standards. Thank you.