

Joint Statement on Behalf of the Vienna NGO Committee on Drugs (VNGOC) and the Alliance on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice

International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women

Vienna International Centre, 22 November 2024

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, esteemed colleagues, and civil society representatives,

On behalf of the Vienna NGO Committee on Drugs and the Alliance on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, it is an honour to address this important event in commemoration of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. We express our gratitude to the Chairs of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs and the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice for the opportunity to speak here today.

The Vienna NGO Committee on Drugs and the Alliance on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice represent civil society organizations working at the intersection of drug policy, crime prevention, and justice. We have seen firsthand how these issues intersect with gender-based violence. Women and girls, especially those affected by organized crime, insecurity, weak governance, risks and harms related to substance use, conflicts, and the climate crisis, face heightened risks of violence. For too many, violence becomes an inescapable reality, fuelled by impunity, inequality, the absence of support systems, and access to justice.

We cannot address gender-based violence in isolation. It requires coordinated, multi-stakeholder approaches that involve not only governments and international bodies but also civil society, grassroots organizations, and affected communities. By working together, we can create comprehensive responses that provide protection, ensure access to justice, and empower survivors to rebuild their lives.

Civil society organizations have a unique and vital role to play. We are on the front lines, advocating for gender equality, supporting survivors, and promoting violence prevention strategies that reflect the lived realities of communities. Our member organizations work with women and girls who are too often silenced, ensuring their voices are heard, their rights are protected, their needs are addressed, and their chances of achieving justice increased. Their work is diverse, ranging from providing safe spaces for survivors to recover, to advocating for stronger legal frameworks that hold perpetrators accountable and prevent future violence.

In the CND mid-term review consultations last year and early this year, coordinated by Vienna and New York NGO Committees, we heard about the serious challenges women who use drugs

face, including limited access to treatment, heightened stigma, and increased risk of gender-based violence. Although global awareness of gender-sensitive health services is growing, many women still struggle to access essential support, especially in prisons and shelters across the world.

The Alliance has a dedicated working group on gender-based violence, which has been carrying out analysis of legislation addressing non-state torture, and advocates for providing clear guidance and support to victims of gender-based violence. The working group is also focused on the need to align international agendas with respect to preventing perpetrators of gender-based violence from accessing firearms, legally or illegally.

However, all of our efforts must be supported by robust, inclusive policies that recognize the interconnectedness of issues such as drug use, crime, and violence. Today, we call on Member States to strengthen their commitment to ending violence against women and girls. We urge them to work alongside civil society to implement holistic approaches that address the complex factors contributing to violence. This means investing in prevention, providing resources for survivors, and ensuring accountability for perpetrators.

Importantly for us here in Vienna, it means ensuring that commitments are protected in the documents and policies that Member States work on here. Commitments to gender equality, human rights, and access to justice are fundamental to end violence against women and girls, and should not be subject to negotiation.

In conclusion, on behalf of the Vienna NGO Committee on Drugs and the Alliance on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, we reaffirm our commitment to combating violence against women and girls. We stand ready to continue working alongside Member States, UN agencies, and fellow civil society organizations to build a world where every woman and girl can live free from violence, in safety and equality.

Thank you.