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Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development

Declaration

(contribution to the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Problem, to be held on 19-21 April 2016, in New York)

CALL FOR A PUBLIC HEALTH ORIENTED DRUG POLICY

The Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe stresses that the world drug problem, constitutes a major public health threat, for both individual drug users and the society as a whole.

The Committee notes that there is today a growing perception that the “war on drugs” has failed to deliver its promise of reducing drug traffic and use worldwide. It also notes that drug-control efforts based on this approach and focusing on repression have been responsible for generating large-scale human rights abuses, including the violation of the right to health, and disastrous consequences in terms of public health.

Recalling the Assembly Resolution 1576 (2007) “For a European convention promoting public health policy in drug control”, the Committee reiterates that the drug problem needs to be addressed with public health responses including substitution treatment, needle exchange programmes and psychosocial treatment. These measures have had a marked effect on the successful long-term rehabilitation of drug users and their reintegration to society. The resultant benefits have been felt by society as a whole, through reductions in the incidence of criminal behaviour, reduced costs for health and criminal justice systems, reduced risks of transmission of HIV and other blood-borne viruses, and, ultimately, reduced drug use levels.

In view of these elements, the Committee strongly supports the call for a change in approach to drug policy and calls on member states to adopt and promote a public-health oriented drug policy based on prevention, treatment and harm reduction. It also invites all participants of the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Problem to defend a new approach to drug policy, which should shift the emphasis from criminal justice to public health.