

Background:

Overview of UNGASS 2016

The United Nations General Assembly Special Session, or UNGASS, is a meeting of UN member states to assess and debate global issues. The 'General Assembly' is the principle policy-making body of the UN and includes equal representation of all member states. Special sessions can be convened at the request of member states to address specific issues. On April 19-21, 2016, UNGASS will meet in New York for a special session on drugs.

The last special session on drugs was held in 1999, with a focus on global elimination of drugs. In 2009, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs met and created a "Political Declaration and Plan of Action on International Cooperation," with targets set for 2019. The next UNGASS on drugs was scheduled for 2019 to assess the progress toward goals set in 2009. However, in September 2012, the presidents of Colombia, Guatemala and Mexico lead a request for a special session on drugs in 2016 that was co-sponsored by 95 other countries. [In December 2012, the General Assembly passed a resolution that stated:](#)

"Decides to convene, early in 2016, a special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem, following the high-level review of the International cooperation against the world drug problem progress made in the implementation by Member States of the Political Declaration and Plan of Action on International Cooperation towards an Integrated and Balanced Strategy to Counter the World Drug Problem, which will be conducted by the Commission on Narcotic Drugs at its fifty-seventh session, in March 2014;

Also decides that the special session of the General Assembly will review the progress in the implementation of the Political Declaration and Plan of Action on International Cooperation towards an Integrated and Balanced Strategy to Counter the World Drug Problem, including an assessment of the achievements and challenges in countering the world drug problem, within the framework of the three international drug control conventions and other relevant United Nations instruments;"

UNGASS 2016 will include, among other topics, a review of the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961, the Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971, and the United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988. In March of 2014, a review of the 2009 Political Declaration was held in Vienna and resulted in the adoption of a [Joint Ministerial Statement](#) and the following week at the 57th Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, the Commission adopted an [UNGASS resolution](#), which laid out a plan for UNGASS 2016 preparations.

At the "Medical Cannabis and Cannabinoids: Policy, Research and Medical Practice" conference in Prague March 4-7, 2015, representatives of organizations of medical cannabis patients from thirteen countries met and established the International Medical Cannabis Patient Coalition (IMCPC), put together a Declaration addressing the *UN General Assembly Special Session on*

Drugs 2016 to adopt it and incorporate it into the *Declaration of the UNGASS 2016*. The IMCPC declaration was delivered to the UN [Commission on Narcotic Drugs](#) in Vienna the following week by [Pavel Bem](#), the Czech representative for the Global Commission on Drug Policy.

The Declaration called on the UN to take the following actions:

Recommends

- that increased attention and resources are being given at the national and international level to the treatment with medical cannabis and cannabinoids, and its research in particular

Invites

- all countries and states to secure stable, safe, economically available access to medical cannabis and its derivatives to everyone who is indicated medically for such treatment

Requires

- that the UN General Assembly Special Session on Drugs 2016 either:
 - exclude the cannabis out of the 1961 UN Convention with no other actions; *or*
 - prepare, debate and accept a Special UN Convention on Cannabis, that would be based on the scientific evidence, human rights and the wellbeing of societies:
and
 - as suggested by the World Health Organization, re-schedules cannabis to account for its medical use, and in amendment prepare special regulations for medical cannabis that would not mimic those of medical opiates and opium

ECDD Meetings

In 2009, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs requested that the World Health Organization (WHO) evaluate the medical utility of cannabis. In June of 2014, the WHO presented an [information document](#) to the Expert Committee on Drug Dependence (ECDD) to guide the committee in carrying out the CND's request. To date ECDD has not completed the evaluation. It is crucial that this report be available for the UNCND's March 2016 meetings in Vienna and the UNGASS 2016 meetings as well.

November 16-20, 2015, the ECDD will be meeting in Geneva. Cannabis is on the on the agenda for the meeting, and medical advocates from all over the globe will address the commission at the opening of the meetings. Advocates, including IMCPC representatives, will urge the ECDD to complete its report on medical cannabis expeditiously.