

AFRICAN UNION

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STATEMENT BY HON. HENDRIETTA BOGOPANE-ZULU, DEPUTY MINISTER OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, SOUTH AFRICA, AND CHAIRPERSON OF THE FIRST AU SPECIALIZED TECHNICAL COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, POPULATION AND DRUG CONTROL TO THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY SPECIAL SESSION ON THE WORLD DRUG PROBLEM

**Your Excellency, Secretary General
Under Secretaries
Your Excellency, President of the General
Assembly
Heads of State and Heads of Delegations
Ministers and Deputy Ministers
Ambassadors
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

We wish to commend you, Mr President, on the manner you are conducting these proceedings.

Mr President, we can assure you that the policy organs of the AU have not only been active, but indeed proactive and forward looking in the area of

drug control over the past 4 years, promoting a balanced and integrated approach to drug control.

In 2012 the Conference of Ministers adopted the AU Plan of Action on Drug Control for the period 2013 to 2017, based on the 2009 UN Political Declaration and Plan of Action. The Ministers also adopted the African Common Position which formed the basis for negotiations in preparation for UNGASS endorsed by the AU Executive Council and the Heads of States.

In accordance with its Plan of Action on Drug Control, which is due for review next year, the African Union emphasises evidence-based responses to drug control to its Member States in order to curb the health and social consequences that drugs cause. Respect for human rights in dealing with the issue of drugs, has been the departure point for the Ministers in Charge of Drug Control. For that reason, drug control is clustered alongside health and population matters in the AU Specialised Technical Committee, which also resonates with the African Union's theme for this year, namely: 2016 the Year of Human Rights with particular reference to the rights of women.

Hence, in the Common African Position for the UNGASS, adopted by the STC Ministers of Health, Population and Drug Control in April 2015, the

health approach to drug control is among the pillars that inform the ten (10) operative paragraphs. This Common Position reflects the AU Plan of Action, for instance its Output 2.4 in its Implementation Matrix, which requests Member States to have available, “Comprehensive, accessible, evidence-informed, ethical and human rights based drug use prevention, dependence treatment and after care services”;

Finally, we wish to underline the usefulness of a regional approach. In the case of the African Union, you can imagine that 54 countries are at different stages of developing their national drug strategies and legislation. You will also appreciate that Member States think differently about drugs. The advantage of the AU meetings is that the different approaches can be openly discussed. One Member State cannot prescribe to all the others. Most importantly, is that Member States follow democratic approaches, to include those affected by decisions that concern them.

In this regard, we wish to borrow lessons learnt in the fight against HIV and AIDS by employing a multi-sectoral response which create an environment drug users form their own network to discuss their problems.

In the spirit of self-representation, we recommend the establishment of support groups in police stations, hospitals, churches, tribal councils or any relevant formation. We also recommend the joint training among the criminal justice system and social work professionals to facilitate the implementation of evidence-based programmes and interventions.

Your Excellencies, the African Union wishes to see that the UNGASS Declaration contains a balanced and integrated approach to drug control pertaining to the roles of the criminal justice and health care systems; that human rights and the health approach be emphasised; that drug control approaches be harmonised and strengthened in different regions; and that the UNGASS have provisions that our people no longer need to die in pain or fear or helplessness.

Mr President, we acknowledge the challenges our continent has, but we take solace and comfort in the successful implementation of Agenda 2063. Together we remain committed to doing everything in our power to create a drug free continent.

It begins with each and everyone of us!

I thank you