Lessons learned from the CND 2020 in Vienna
Katrin Schiffer, C-EHRN, April 2020

The CND 2020 was organised in the first week of March and was one of the last big events before the Covid-19 crisis hit Europe and the rest of the world. During the CND, Covid-19 was an issue, but still most of the participants somehow laughed away the threat and many of us believed that there was no real need to panic. Only one or two weeks later, we realized how serious Covid-19 is. Since then it has become the main point of discussion and affects people all around the globe.

So what did I take home from the CND 2020?

**International Drug Policy matters**
International drug policy is not something remote, which has nothing to do with us. It does matter and does influence the situation of PWUDs in many ways. The CND shows the fundamental differences in drug policy approaches around the world and the related consequences of these policies. While some countries are still calling for a drug free world, an increasing number of countries is committed to a more realistic drug policy approach, building on evidence and human rights-based arguments.

Coming from Western Europe, where drug policy is less divided and much more build on rational arguments, this is important to keep in mind. As NGOs, we have to be present, we need to fulfill our watchdog function and show solidarity with PWUDs and harm reduction services all around the world.

**Civil Society is essential**
Civil society is strongly involved and represented during the CND. Although the UN system is not designed for direct civil society involvement, things have definitely improved in the past years. Supported by the VNGOC, which links NGOs and the Vienna-based agencies involved in setting drug policy, different opportunities for input, feedback and consultation have been created. NGOs can give statements, there are opportunities for exchange and NGOs can organise side events, in cooperation with other NGOs and/or national governments, addressing specific topics.

The presence and active involvement of civil society is essential and provides the opportunity to be heard and to question certain policies, which are violating human rights.

**Opportunities for cooperation**
The participation to the CND offers opportunities for cooperation. Building alliances with other NGOs can help to address certain policy issues more effectively. But also the cooperation with national governments is essential. Government representatives can support resolutions and statements and support and co-organise side events. This provides credibility and impact and can in the long term contribute as well to advocacy on the national level.

In conclusion: Participation to the CND is important. It has put C-EHRNs European focus on drug policy in perspective. It definitely contributes to a broader understanding on drug policy, but it also shows the complexity of the UN system and international drug policy in particular.

Learn more about the CND and International Drug Policy at IDPC and the VNGOC. Have a look as well at the short videos, which were produced during the CND by the Rights Reporter Foundation.