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Excellencies:

As representatives of ECOSOC-accredited non-governmental organizations who have attended the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND), we write to express our concern and discontent with the recent recommendation by the Extended Bureau, relayed by CND secretary Andres Finguerut, that the Committee of the Whole should be a “private” meeting excluding NGOs. This recommendation violates the spirit of NGO inclusion as expressed in CND resolution 49/2 and by former Secretary General Annan’s call for greater engagement of civil society actors.

The Extended Bureau has not to our knowledge provided a rationale for its decision, which endorses a change of practice that would seriously hinder transparency and civil society participation in the international response to illicit drugs and efforts to prevent transmission of blood-borne diseases such as HIV, HCV and other drug-related harms. The decision appears to have been made without consultation with NGOs, though with legal advice from UNODC. It is unclear on what grounds NGOs, as opposed to other observers such as IGOs, would be excluded from the Committee of the Whole. Furthermore, member states already have, and have exercised, the option to convene private meetings to draft and negotiate resolutions.

The Extended Bureau's recommendation that the Chairman of the Committee of the Whole propose NGO exclusion at the opening session raises the urgent need for clarity on CND procedures and for action to underscore the importance of NGO involvement and transparency.

We urge ECOSOC and other concerned parties to oppose the recommendation that NGOs be excluded, and to intervene in this matter. It is also important to clarify the procedures through which such a proposal might be adopted or rejected, and to communicate these in writing as soon as possible to the Vienna NGO committee, to ECOSOC-accredited NGOs seeking to register to attend the CND, and to the chair of the Committee of the Whole.

Sincerely,

Joanne Csete, Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network
Raminta Stuiyte, Central and Eastern European Harm Reduction Network
Nikos Dedes, European AIDS Treatment Group
Joseph Amon, Human Rights Watch
Daniel Wolfe, Open Society Institute

cc:

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