**DRAFT Oral Statement**

**Drug use and drug law enforcement in the context of ‘A holistic approach to the protection and promotion of the rights of children working and/or living on the street’**

(Res 13/20)

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International Harm Reduction Association

Thank you Mr. President

I am making this statement on behalf of the International Harm Reduction Association.

The role of drugs and alcohol in pushing children towards the streets, in keeping them there, and in exposing them to violence, is clear – but often merely footnoted when we talk about street children, or responses to drugs. The connections must be more closely drawn.

Drug and alcohol dependence within the family is a well known push factor out of the home and towards the streets. Exclusion from school is a risk factor for both street involvement and initiation into drug use.

States should provide assistance to families, including through specialised social work, and focus efforts on school retention.

Children who live on the streets and use drugs, alcohol or solvents, do so for many reasons: to cope, to self-medicate, to quell hunger, to fit in with peers, and for fun. It carries many risks, including death from overdose. When drugs are injected the health risks are acute – including HIV infection.

States must scale up and adequately fund: confidential counselling, outreach, and specialised treatment and harm reduction interventions. For such services to succeed, a supportive legal and policy environment must be created - and the voices of street children who use drugs must be heard.

Drug dealing can be a source of income both for survival and as a means to sustain drug use. The primary response to this, however, is law enforcement. This can and does expose children to significant violence additional to that which they already encounter. For many, the police are the only contact they have with the state – and it can be a source of fear.

Police attention must be redirected. We call on States to amend laws that criminalise children who use or possess drugs; develop alternative policing indicators; and hold to account those who abuse children.

Mr. President, we close with a story from a recent UNICEF report:

*Yana was just eight years old when she started living on the streets. Her father, an alcoholic, died young and she was separated from her mother who was sent to jail. Yana begged, stole and prostituted herself to survive. Drugs helped her cope with her life. She shared needles. Yana died at the age of 13, addicted to drugs and infected with HIV.*

Do not allow drugs and drug policies to be a footnote. Yana’s story, alone, demands more.

Thank you