

April 11, 2016

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States of America
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Re: The 2016 United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS)
on the World Drug Problem

Dear Mr. President,

We write in follow up to our letter of February 17, 2016, regarding your participation in the upcoming United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on the World Drug Problem. We appreciate your continued focus on establishing and expanding a new approach to drug policy in this country – one that moves away from a punitive, disproportionate, and racially discriminatory criminal justice response to one that focuses on public health, prevention, and access to evidence-based mental health care and treatment services. Your announcement of additional access to opioid treatment and overdose prevention, your granting of clemency to people previously sentenced to long sentences for drug crimes, your continued advocacy for the passage of sentencing reform legislation in Congress – all of these underscore the personal passion and commitment that you bring to these critical issues.

With all this in mind, we would like to reiterate our request that you give the plenary address on behalf of the United States at the upcoming UNGASS. The UNGASS will be attended by heads of state and cabinet officials; high-level diplomats; UN officials charged with developing international responses to drugs, crime, AIDS, and discrimination; and representatives of civil society from the world over. The progressive shift in U.S. domestic drug policy over the last decade has the potential to serve as a model for this international community, urging other countries to avoid a dangerously punitive response and demonstrating an approach to drug policy that is more compassionate, just, and effective from the local to the international level.

Addressing our partners in the United Nations on this topic would add to your legacy of leadership to advance public health; increase equal justice; and strengthen public safety and security for individuals, communities, and nations. And as you noted in your recent State of the Union address, the world looks to the United States for leadership on the issues that impact the global community. That unique leadership role gives you the opportunity to use the 2016 UNGASS on the World Drug Problem as a catalyst for reimagining the way drug policy is addressed, not just domestically but around the globe, establishing the United States as a progressive world partner committed to a new approach on an international scale.

At the last UNGASS on this subject in 1998, then-President Bill Clinton gave the plenary address to the gathering of international partners. Then and for the decade following, the United States has had an enormous impact on drug policies in the rest of the world. We now have an opportunity to export a more effective, just, and humane approach – and to join international partners who are

doing the same. This takes leadership and participation at the highest levels, and we urge you to attend.

We thank you in advance for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



AIDS United



The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights



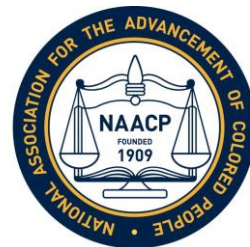
American Civil Liberties Union



Legal Action Center



Doctors for America



NAACP



LatinoJustice PRLDEF



Union Theological Seminary