

Call to Action: Support Global Drug Policy Reform

World Drug Day, 26 June 2009

I. The War on Drugs has become a War on People

As the United Nations brings worldwide attention to problems related to illicit drugs, we call for a new approach.

In too many countries, the “war on drugs” has become a war on people. Millions of non-violent drug users face abuse and imprisonment, while they have no access to proper healthcare or effective treatment. Low-level traders and producers receive sentences disproportionate to their crimes and languish in prisons around the globe. Millions more face crop destruction and police harassment as they struggle to make ends meet, with few alternatives as the global economy falters. Meanwhile, the HIV epidemic gains pace.

II. Five Actions Today

After decades of policies that have failed to make our societies safer or healthier, and given overwhelming evidence which shows that criminalizing drugs is both counterproductive and highly destructive, we call on governments to:

1. Focus on reducing the harms related to drug trade and use, such as making needle and syringe exchange programs widely available.
2. Decriminalize the possession of drugs for personal use.
3. Ensure that evidence-based treatments for pain and addiction are widely available, including methadone and buprenorphine.
4. Treat supporting farmers in moving away from coca or poppy cultivation as a development issue.
5. Comply fully with human rights obligations in any drug control measure, ensuring proportionality of penalties, abolishing the death penalty, and avoiding non-evidence-based forms of treatment.

III. Driving Away Drug Users Creates Public Health Disasters

Nearly three decades into the global HIV epidemic, we reiterate that driving people who use drugs underground only makes the transmission of HIV and hepatitis more likely. The number of HIV infections due to injecting drug use is rising steadily. In parts of Eastern Europe and South-East Asia, this figure reaches 80%.

As the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies has said, *“Forcing drug users to hide and denying them access to life-saving treatment and prevention services is creating a public health disaster. This happens even though the evidence from scientific and medical research on best practices and cost benefit analyses is overwhelmingly in favour of harm reduction programming.... The message is clear. It is time to be guided by light of science, not by the darkness of ignorance and fear.”*

Indeed, rather than a security-focused approach that costs roughly \$100 billion per year worldwide, we need to look at this first and foremost through the lens of public health. In the blind effort to rid the world of drugs, 80% of cancer patients worldwide are denied access to opiate-based pain relief.

IV. Adopt a Humane Approach

A humane, compassionate approach to drug use based on harm reduction principles and respect for human rights is the most effective way to limit the negative impact of drug use, trade, and production. Scientific and medical research on best practices and cost benefit analyses overwhelmingly favors harm reduction programs, including needle exchange, drug substitution therapy, and condom distribution.

We applaud countries who have already taken steps in this direction. Recently, both Germany and Switzerland have voted to make medical heroin available for chronically dependent opiate users and the new U.S. administration has come out in support of needle exchange. Ecuador pardoned thousands of drug ‘mules’ imprisoned with disproportionate sentences and 80 Argentinean judges made a public call to reform their country’s drug laws.

In order to stop the spiral of drug-related violence and disease intensifying across the globe, more countries must follow suit.

This Call to Action is supported by:

International Organizations

President Cardoso, Co-chair, Latin American Commission on Drugs and Democracy

Michel Kazatchkine, Executive Director, Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria

Massimo Barra, Vice-President, Standing Commission of Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement

Kieran Daly, Executive Director, International Council of AIDS Service Organizations

Balasz Denes, Executive Director, Hungarian Civil Liberties Union

Gregg Gonzalves, International Treatment Preparedness Coalition

Martin Jelsma, Drugs and Democracy program, Transnational Institute

Craig McClure, Executive Director, International AIDS Society

Dr. Robert Newman, International Center for Advancement of Addiction Treatment

Professor Gerry Stimson, Executive Director, International Harm Reduction Association

Raminta Stuikyte, Director, Eurasian Harm Reduction Network

Carmen Tarrades, International Community of Women Living with HIV/AIDS

Mike Trace, Chairman, International Drug Policy Consortium

Kasia Malinowska-Sempruch and Daniel Wolfe, Open Society Institute

National Organizations

Zackie Ahmat, Deputy General-Secretary, Treatment Action Campaign, South Africa

Dr. Apinun Aramrattana, MD, PhD, Department of Family Medicine, Faculty of Medicine,

Chiang Mai University, Thailand

Patrizia Carrieri PhD, Researcher, French National Institute for Health and Medical Research (INSERM), France

Rubem César Fernandes, Director, Viva Rio, Brazil

Jacek Charmast, Chairman, Polish Drug Policy Network, Poland

Professor John Nicholas Crofts, Nossal Institute for Global Health, University of Melbourne, Australia

Aleksander Ciechanowicz, Director General, Humanitarian Action, St Petersburg Fund for Medical and Social Programs, Russia

Dr. Marcus Day DSc, Director, Caribbean Drug & Alcohol Research Institute, Saint Lucia

Clement Edwards, Director, Substance Abuse Advisory Council Secretariat of Saint Lucia

Richard Elliott, Executive Director, Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, Canada

Professor Pat O'Hare, Director, HIT, United Kingdom

Hakima Himmich, Director, Association de Lutte Contre le SIDA, Morocco

Professor Dr. Adeeba Kamarulzaman, President, Malaysian AIDS Council, Malaysia

Sandra Kanck, Australian Parliamentary Group on Drug Law Reform, Australia

Grażyna Konieczny, Chairperson, Social AIDS Committee, Poland

Professor Joep M.A. Lange, Center for Poverty-related Communicable Diseases, Academic Medical Center, University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands

Prem K Limbu, President, National Users' Network, Nepal

Joesph Meharris, Manager, d'Oasis Drop in Centre, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago

Professor Daniel Mejia, Economics Department, University of the Andes, Colombia

Phumi Mtetwa, Executive Director, Lesbian and Gay Equality Project, South Africa

Ethan Nadelmann, Executive Director, Drug Policy Alliance, United States

Professor Aimé Charles Nicolas, *University Hospital of Fort de France, Martinique*

Professor Wiktor Osiatyński, Poland

Dr. Cristina Pimenta, Executive Director, Brazilian Interdisciplinary AIDS Association, Brazil

Professor Carla Rossi, Director, Centre for Biostatistics and Bioinformatics of the University of Rome Tor Vergata, Italy

Sebastian Saville, Executive Director, Release, United Kingdom

Joel Simpson, Founding Co-Chairperson, Society Against Sexual Orientation Discrimination, Guyana

Paisan Suwannawong, Director, Thai AIDS Treatment Action Group, Thailand

Professor Pierre de Vos, Department of Public Law and Jurisprudence, Law Faculty, University of Western Cape, South Africa

Professor Daniel Tarantola, School of Public Health and Community Medicine, University of New South Wales, Australia/France

Dr. Alex Wodak, President, Australian Drug Law Reform Foundation, Australia

Wan Yanhai, Director, Beijing Aizhixing Institute, China