

**COMMISSION ON NARCOTIC DRUGS
58th SESSION**

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General debate on the special session of the General
Assembly on the world drug problem in 2016

Statement by

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Thank you Mr. Chairman for giving the opportunity to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent to address the 58th session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. We note with satisfaction the increased understanding of drug addiction as a public health issue. Over the last decade the IFRC has been advocating, also in this forum, for what we call a humanitarian drug policy. We see that states have begun calling for new and better approaches to the drug problem leading up to the UNGASS in 2016.

People dependent on drugs are among the most vulnerable and marginalized groups in the world. Yet, instead of being met with understanding and provided with equitable access to treatment and care - drug users remain excluded from society, they face social stigma, they are punished, imprisoned and discriminated against. They continue to face serious health consequences; for example, almost half of all drug users are infected with Hepatitis C.

Let me open a parentheses; 2015 is an exciting year regarding Hepatitis C. For the first time ever we have new drugs which can cure Hepatitis C. Millions of people can win the fight against their decease. Governments should seriously consider distributing the new anti-Hepatitis C drug to all in need. We need to remind ourselves on the successful strategy against HIV that was initiated some decades ago. Perhaps the Global Fund, who has contributed in changing the world for the better, should be interested, not only in HIV, TB and Malaria, but also in including Hepatitis C in its efforts.

Another important point I would like to make; it is estimated that between 56 and 90 per cent of people who use drugs face imprisonment at some point during their life. They have poor access to the much needed services and their human rights are continually breached. I think we all agree that this is not acceptable: People using drugs should be treated as persons with an illness and not as criminals or sinners!

Regrettably, the funding for programmes supporting drug users has fallen dangerously short over the past decade. It is in the interest of all governments to accept and extend a caring hand towards people using drugs instead of rejecting them. Addressing their humanitarian needs is an important step leading to their empowerment and recovery. A well-known drug user is always a problematic person, dangerous to himself and to others. A now known drug user is twice as dangerous. It is in our common and universal interest to keep in touch with all drug users of a country. This is not impossible if there is a good political will to do so. We need a different cultural approach in which we underline the health challenges and priorities vis-a-vis the criminal side of drug abuse.

Mr. Chairman, today we would like to take this opportunity and call upon governments to ensure equitable access to treatment and care. We also call upon governments to implement effective measures to reduce health risks and promote social inclusion, at all times, including in disaster and crisis situations. However, in order to meet this, additional resources are required. The existing therapies for drug users cannot change when a government changes due to a conflict, as recently happened in Europe.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies pledges to actively address the problem of substance abuse from a humanitarian perspective. With a global presence in 189 countries and through its unique network of 17 million volunteers and its unique position of auxiliary to public authorities, we are ready to intensify operational interaction and to collaborate with governmental institutions, different partners and stakeholders, as well as with media and the private sector in promoting the concept and good practices of a more humanitarian drug policy.
