

Vienna – marzo 2015

Commission on Narcotic Drug

Working with drug offenders inside and outside prison

If I compare the meeting of these days here with the meetings done 10 years ago I find an enormous difference.

All together step by step we have a better knowledge of drug problem in the world. The leit-motif of all the speeches we heard has been the concept that drug dependent people are ill persons which need to be treated in the interest of all. Every drug user can stop if he receive attention and therapies. It seems that everybody agree with this idea, but it was not easy to arrive to this point.

As representative of the biggest organization of voluntary works in the world in 189 countries with more than 13 million of devoted and dedicated volunteers we must thank the representatives of many NGOs who contributed to this dramatic change of perspectives and of priorities. Their advocacy has been fundamental. I remember and it is good if all of us remember, when activists stressing the importance of harm reduction were even not allowed to enter this building and were obliged to discuss the issue out of the metro station!

But as we wrote in a document of International Federation, “advocacy is on safer ground when supported by activities”. If there are not actions and activities everyone can speak. But this is not so useful. We have an enormous work to do to assure the availability of adequate treatments to all drug users in the world. Till now stigma, discrimination, punishment, imprisonment have the majority in the response.

Also so called rehabilitation centers are more similar to concentration camp than to therapeutic communities.

1/3 of prisoners are in jail for drug related crimes. This is a colossal own goal and a scandal for humankind. Prisons are one of the main unsolved issue of humanity. In no other field of human action, the difference between middle age and third millennium is less evident as for a prison. There is true risk that one person enter in prison as an hill person and when he come out he has become a criminal, because the power in prison is in the hands of the most criminal and drug user usually are not big criminals but people able to create damage to themself more than to others.

As you know the Red Cross was not created for drug related issues but 10 years ago in Vienna were established 7 Fundamental Principles: the first and more important of which is the principle of humanity.

Humanity means taking care of the most vulnerable people. Drug user are between the most vulnerable people. We need to work so that drug user don't go in prison and can be helped outside. That is one of the reason why RC takes care of drug user. We created the Partnership. I ask you all to take contact with Partnership and to become activists of the Partnership and of the RC/RC Movement.