

COMMISSION ON NARCOTIC DRUGS

61th SESSION

12 – 16 March 2018, Vienna

Follow-up to the special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem held in 2016, including the seven thematic areas of the outcome document of the special session.

Intervention by IFRC (15 March)

Dr. Massimo Barra, Chair of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Partnership on Substance Abuse

Madame Chair thank you for giving me the floor.

My name is Massimo Barra; I am a medical doctor, Chairman of the Partnership on substance abuse of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent.

As the world's largest humanitarian network, Red Cross and Red Crescent mission is to prevent or mitigate human suffering in all its forms, wherever we see it, and independent of political bias.

As I can testify from a lifetime of work with people who use drugs, this issue remains a major cause of suffering across the world, and among those who suffer the most, drug users are certainly the most discriminated. Drug users remain too often excluded from society, face social stigma, and in

some countries, are punished and imprisoned rather than treated.

For a very long time, we have been calling for a more humane approach to fighting drugs. This call was based on a strong sense of humanity, but most importantly, it was based on well-documented evidence.

An encouraging development has been marked during the UNGASS. For the first time participants and media focused more widely on the failure of the “War on Drugs”, the inability of the international community to win this “war” and the need for new approaches.

In that regard, we strongly welcomed the Special Session’s outcome document called for the

implementation of effective measures to reduce health risks that are people-centred and inclusive, to minimise the adverse public health and social consequences of drug abuse. The resolution also called for measures to uphold the prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatments and to eliminate impunity.

Now it is time to implement those commitments on the ground!

Despite this, in many communities still exists negative perception and fears of drugs and of people who use drugs; this is reinforced by media and ignored by policies. All this make drugs and people who use drugs “easy targets”, that further supports their exclusion from society and limits

their access to treatment and care. Still the problem is not yet acknowledged as worldwide humanitarian challenge that needs to be addressed with evidence-based approach instead of responses that are populist, punitive and dogmatic.

For the Red Cross and Red Crescent, the most vulnerable groups including People Who Use Drugs are our constituents. We were among the first international organizations to call for humane, evidence-based, harm reduction policies.

The IFRC and Red Cross Red Crescent Societies and other partners have significant achievements addressing health challenges of people who use drugs. We work closely with them providing psychosocial support and care and methadone

substitution therapy. There is a strong evidence for the effectiveness of these treatments.

We advocate for equitable access to treatment for everyone who needs it, including drug users, that are especially the vulnerable, the marginalized and the criminalized: those who are the hardest to reach are among the people who need our help the most.

(Massimo Barra)