

## Istanbul - Green Crescent General Assembly

03.12.2019

Mr. President, dear friends of Yesilay, I have the honour to speak today on behalf of RC/RC Federation which include Turkish Kisilay . RC/RC Movement is a family with a father, a mother, 191 children in 191 Countries. The “father” is the ICRC: it works all over the world in time of war to give protection and assistance to all the parties in conflict. The “mother” is the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent to help the most vulnerable people suffering for health problems or poverty or natural and man made catastrophes. The children are the National Societies of Red Cross and Red Crescent, one for each country of the world.

First of all I would like to underline that Red Cross and Red Crescent are the same thing, share the same principles, call themselves all Sister Societies. Secondly I would like to take this opportunity to underline how the Federation and your organization are similar both in term of structure and of principles: the only difference is that Yesilay is focused mainly on drug problems, while we are more generalist. For this reason I think that a cooperation between our organizations would be very useful for both. The Red Cross and Red Crescent are independent but have a special relationship with governments as auxiliaries to the public powers at all level in the humanitarian fields. Being “ generalist” means that all kind of human suffering is matter for our intervention. Also Drugs are a global issue! They have devastating effects on human rights, on health, on the economics and social well being for entire communities.

Drugs affect especially the most vulnerable people, living in difficult social, environmental and economic conditions: Involvement in drugs is often the consequence of poor health, poor education, low income, ineffective or non-existent social support networks, instability or unemployment. But it is also true that drugs are democratic, indeed affects all kind of social and economic groups. Stigma and discrimination are very democratic too, like virus that affects all people from all cultural settings.

Decide to dedicate and commit ourselves in this field is a very brave and hard job. Indeed we are also a target of discrimination, as if substance abuse was an infective disease which affects

also who is working to help drug users. And it is a great hope for me to see so many activists like you all, here engaged in fighting all drugs consequences in our society.

But it is not enough what we try to do against drugs. For many years governments made efforts to address the drug problems, with the hope to eliminate or reduce the drugs from the market through the so called “ War on drugs ”. Unfortunately this war, started about 40 years ago, very soon became an ideological WAR against drug users, causing millions of deaths and trampling people human rights with punishment, torture and law enforcement methods. Still today hundred thousands of people worldwide with drug disorders are victim of abuses, being incarcerated instead of being treated or recognized just as they are: sick people in need of help. Another strategy used in many countries is the paternalistic attitude to address the problem, as in the slogan of Nancy Reagan : “Just say NO”. After 40 years of underevaluation and persecutions of drug addicts, the use, production and trafficking of drugs is not decreased. On the contrary it is rising ,bringing human and economic disaster and people suffering, even more.

I read the document of Istanbul initiative. I found it inspiring and I think that in 2020 we should agree on new strategies, in a methodology to be used to counter and address the drug social problems from one side and the health consequences in the other side. We suggest to call it :HUMANITARIAN DRUG POLICY. We can't allow other human dramatic consequences.

Evidence says that a human and health-centered approach is exponentially more effective than punishing. The gap between recommendations and practice is significant. Now a day we have so many documents and high level recommendations from all UN Agency and Medical scientific teams worldwide. This is good but it's not enough because too many governments don't listen the voice of evidence and of science using the problem of drug abuse to make propaganda among people by strengthening their prejudice about people who use drugs.

For this reason 121 RC/RC National Societies in 2005 felt the urgency to build up an international Consensus recognizing and reinforcing the Red Cross/Red Crescent's unique auxiliary role in encouraging policy makers nationally and internationally to adopt an innovative and humanitarian approach to this key public health issue.

How? By providing access to treatments instead of let them be arrested or wait them to die of overdose or of some infection diseases. When? Everyday throughout our voluntary service, in the streets, in the house shelters, taking care of the most vulnerable people.

By peer educators that succeeded in the therapy and stopped using drugs. By making educations in our communities and school, sharing our values and promoting healthy life styles.

But our Job in the Red Cross and Red Crescent only, was not enough. The consensus signed for the first time in Rome, Italy, in 2005, needed to be opened to all Civil Society Organizations, to all NGOs directly involved in the daily work in support of drug addicts. That's why one month ago we decided to re-launch the Rome Consensus, involving experts and institutions. We need to stand up with stronger voice. We have to organize a bigger and higher coalition to be sure that our policy makers will be influenced by us. By our strategy of peace, equality and compassion.

We have the unique advocacy opportunity not just for Red Cross/red Crescent Movement but also for all international and national organizations that do active militancy on drug problems, to join forces and efforts. Together we are stronger!

Integrating and mobilizing our volunteers and leadership in communities.

Encouraging cooperation and partnerships to develop public health, harm reduction and humanitarian oriented drug responses and activities, involving peers, including drug users and people living with HIV and Hepatitis.

We could make a revolution just by allowing that in all our countries:

- We abolish all the difficulties against access to therapies,
- we promote the use of Naloxone, to avoid overdose deaths,
- we promote the substitution therapy by methadone or Buprenorphine or Alcover for alcohol addicts,
- we facilitate the access to therapy for all HIV and Hepatitis positive patients,

And especially,

- we facilitate making easy and free the access of all drug-users to therapies.

Each government should know all the drug users of his country. A drug user well known is always a dangerous person for himself and for others, but a drug user not known is twice most dangerous.

Time is therapeutic, like a love story which start with a honey moon but after some years the routine is the stone of love, also of this crazy love of a person for one or more substances.

The main objectives of a therapy is to avoid the point of no return, acting to create and facilitate alternatives to the use of drugs.

The detoxication is not the starting point but the point of arrival. Therapy is a long process in which is important to take care and protect the client till the moment in which the negative aspects of drugs will be more than positive. And this, I insist will happen only with the time.

The Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement call all the Governments and Civil Society to follow this humanitarian drug policy in the interest of all.

*Massimo Barra*