

## **CND 2022 (Vienna)**

### **Side Event of Italy**

15<sup>th</sup> March 2022 – 13.10

**The Humanitarian approach to drug policy: opportunities and challenges for an effective cooperation between public authorities and health-based organizations**

#### **SPEECH**

Thank you Chair,

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. As Red Cross/Red Crescent for a very long time we have been calling for a more humane approach to fighting drugs.

For this reason I conceived in 2005 this global campaign, called the Rome Consensus, to build an international alliance that aims to develop humanitarian drug policies together with Government and Civil Society Organizations. This Manifesto is designed to explore solutions that combine humanitarian attitudes in health, criminal justice, prevention and community responses to addiction problems.

The Rome Consensus is supported all around the world. But much more needs to be done in order to be heard by governments and to inspire international community on the effectiveness of humanitarian drug policy.

Our dream is to unify the voices of policy makers, professionals, leaders, first responders, activists, and people suffering for drugs, under the same humanitarian principles of the Rome Consensus.

I agree with the Minister Dadone: the pathway to Treatment should be considered as a Continuum of Care. This is a long path in which many actors have a role and might intervene. The first step is to avoid the death by promoting harm reduction activities. National polices can no longer refuse the benefit of opioid substitution therapy, nor of other harm reduction programmes.

Our strategy is to meet, reach and treat all the people with drug disorders. It's a fruitful solution that bring health services and care closer to the hard to reach population, and I'm glad that Minister Dadone has mentioned it.

I believe that it is in the interest of any Government welcome those who want to be treated in a recovery center.

The more people are treated, the higher chances that drug market will claim fewer victims and makes less profit. In this sense facilitating the access of patient contributes to make prevention. Treatment is the best prevention!

Today, despite evidence, still many governments keep considering drug users just as criminals and therefore are punished and incarcerated instead of being treated. Public health is the best ally of drug control. Public health is the antidote to build safer communities.

Indeed, 1 out of 4 of the inmates in the world are in prison for drug reasons, and they are forced to live in a pathological and pathogenic environment.

The amount of resources dedicated to public safety and public order exceeds that of resources directed to public health, with very scarce results. This relationship should be re-balanced. Drug addiction is a disease that should be treated as many others. It's a common interest to know all the drug users and avoid harm, suffering and I would say also avoid the frustration of Police Officers to deal with people that should be under treatment regime and not under justice regime.

Before ending, allow me to share another dream, I personally had the honor to sit in the first Board of the Global Fund, who was an extraordinary measure that changed million people life affected by Hiv, TB and Malaria worldwide. This successful model can inspire and show us the right road to take together: a new Global Fund on Drugs lead by humanitarian principles. Such political and economic committment can truly mitigate the health conditions of people left behind because of their addiction and can dramatically decrease the rates of violence and deaths all over the world.

As RCRC we are ready to make our part. In our globalized world no single institution is able to act alone. Cooperation and partnership are needed to improve the quality of life of drug users and of the society as a whole.

Thank you.

**Massimo Barra**

**International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies**