

2022 CND Thematic Discussion

Statement by the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)
Vienna, 21-22 September 2022

Mister Chair,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to address this audience on behalf of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

Our mission is to prevent or mitigate human suffering, and, substance abuse remains a major cause of suffering across the world. Among those most impacted are drug users themselves, with their needs remaining unmet.

We welcome the achievements in addressing and countering the world drug problem in the last years. Nevertheless, there are still disparities in progress among and within countries, taking a serious toll on human dignity and the respect of basic human rights.

We must ensure that all people who use drugs have access to lifesaving health services, free of stigma, transforming commitment into tangible action, strengthening effective, comprehensive, scientific evidence-based demand reduction initiatives in a continuum of care.

It is in the interest of each country and of each of us to accept and extend a supportive hand towards people using drugs instead of rejecting them. The International Drug Control System recognizes the need of individuals for adequate treatment, in due respect of human dignity and basic human rights. Also treatment offered as an alternative to criminal justice sanctions, must be in line with ethical standards set up by the international community.

Mister Chair,

A health-centered and rights-based approach, focusing on achieving Universal Health Coverage (UHC) is the best way forward.

UHC describes the right of all people to accessible, available, quality health services. Yet, despite all progress, many vulnerable groups, such as drug users, still lack the access to health.

UHC is a priority area of work for the IFRC Network. We are closely collaborating with the Civil Society Engagement Mechanism for UHC2030 (CSEM), to capture progress made towards UHC and raise community voices. This year, Villa Maraini Foundation, National Agency for Addictions of the Italian Red Cross and Training Centre of the IFRC, organized a country consultation in Italy, engaging drug users, community

members and civil society organizations to share their views on challenges and barriers to accessing basic health and social services for people who use drugs.

Participants in the consultation identified several barriers to accessing healthcare, including long waiting list, bureaucracy, lack of an adequate number of health providers, stigma and discrimination and mandatory referrals. Women who use drugs reported even more difficulties in accessing healthcare. Participants pointed the need to advocate for a better collaboration between public health services and civil society organizations.The positive role of peers like former drug users was also underlined.

Mister Chair,

IFRC Network, led by the RCRC Partnership on Substance Abuse, the mover and shaker of the Manifesto Rome Consensus for a Humanitarian Drug Policy, developed initiatives to respond to the health disaster caused by drug use and drug addiction. RCRC staff and volunteers are best placed to reach those most hard to reach and finally ensure that no one is left behind, working to bridge the gap that still exists between formal health institutions and the most vulnerable, but this cannot be possible without Member States commitment on the ground.

Thank you.

Dr. Massimo Barra

Chairman of the Red Cross/Red Crescent Partnership on Substance Abuse