

5th International HIV Conference EECAAC -2016

Sustainable development goals in the context of HIV/AIDS Moscow

Everywhere in the world, the first and most important sustainable objective in combatting HIV is to establish and maintain contact with all persons living with the virus, whether they are aware of their condition or not.

Many of these live in the shadows, on the margins of society.

Injecting drug users and **sex workers** are some of the main groups who fuel the epidemic; therefore, an aggressive strategy is essential to **identify, reach, test** and **treat** the affected individuals in these groups of high-risk population. Furthermore, in order to ensure sustainable treatment it is of utmost importance to maintain a **long-term relationship** with those who contracted the disease.

The offer of HIV screening must be brought out of the hospitals, clinics and formal centres and **brought onto the streets**, reaching the groups most at risk who are **reluctant, fearful** to approach the official health care system.

To achieve this, it is essential to **remove the barriers** that could hinder this contact, such as the fear of negative consequences, particularly the fear of being judged and of being socially, legally or morally discriminated against.

I believe it is important to mention here a major breakthrough in the treatment of **another disease** that spreads in the same manner as the HIV and it is even more common in the high-risk groups.

The recent introduction of new drugs capable of effectively **curing HCV** has made it extremely important to similarly identify all HCV carriers and allow them to start treatment. Any public health screening measure addressing HIV could and should at the same time address screening for HCV. The fact that HIV is **controllable** and HCV is now

curable removes part of the aura of sin and death that has surrounded these diseases, making them nearly “normal” diseases.

Therefore, in Eastern Europe and Central Asia a great need has arisen for a public health action aimed at **identifying** all the HIV and HCV carriers and refer them to adequate treatment. Moreover, **screening** should be considered in a similar manner to that of any other disease, without the stigmatization and discrimination characteristic of the past decades. The treatment can only be effective if we create an **environment** where those affected feel **comfortable, accepted** and **respected** in their human dignity.

Through their large network of volunteers present in the smallest communities till the last mile, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies across the region are well-placed **to increase their partnership** with local authorities and other stakeholders in such a way as to **bridge the existing gap** between the formal health institutions and the most marginalized population.

When the authorities of a country declare a “war “ they should always keep in mind that the war can also be lost. We must forget the philosophy of the “war on drugs” because the “war on drugs” has been already lost. I also hope we will forget the slogan “**just say no**” that has caused so many damages and so many deaths in every part of the world, and it is even offensive for the persons involved.

The current available treatment that makes these diseases **controllable** or **curable** is the **game changer** of our modern times and should be seen as a great **opportunity** for introducing **new approaches**.