

Commission on Narcotic Drugs 63rd session

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- a) Drug treatment and health services continue to fall short of meeting needs and deaths related to drug use have increased;
- b) the rate of transmission of HIV, the hepatitis C virus and other blood-borne diseases associated with drug use, including injecting drug use in some countries, remains high.

Speech by Dr. Massimo Barra – Special Envoy on Health of the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Mr. Chairman,
distinguished Delegates,

COVID-19 is a global public health emergency posing unprecedented challenges, but now that the health system is mainly focused on covid-19 response we are concerned about the risk that this become **the “perfect excuse” to justify further inaction against the persons that I call “sick for drugs”** and not as an opportunity to use this extraordinary attention to increase care for people with drug disorders.

Preventing the spread of this virus requires outreach services to all and ensuring non-discriminatory access to prevention, medical care and treatment for all persons. **This could be the opportunity to reduce also the drug pandemic by utilizing the same strategy.**

Health system is now called to reach population everywhere to test them for coronavirus, this might be the right moment to meet and test people also to detect the Viral Hepatitis and Hiv, as “professional” diseases of drug users. We need that social care and harm reduction services continue in the community for this specific population by reaching them where they are.

Ensure to all the people with drug disorders the availability of the opioid substitution therapy, is one of the vital services we highlighted in our Statement, the Rome Consensus 2.0, that aim to build a humanitarian drug policy.

Just few days before the disruption of Covid pandemic, during the last CND in Vienna, we launched this Statement, that I invite you to read and sign based on the belief that the existing international commitments made by Member States **provide an opportunity to modernise national drug policies** and make them truly balanced, comprehensive, and human rights-based.

Treatment and punishment can't work together. Treating people “sick for drugs” is a common interest for all the humanity in order to have healthier, peaceful and secure communities.

A quick, miraculous cure does not exist. Punishment neither can be a solution.

Evidence shows that therapy is a long path. The chance of success of the therapy is always proportional to the time spent under treatment. Availability of treatment is still a challenge, **not only in low income countries, but at time is a problem also in more developed countries, where remain material barriers like the long waiting lists to access the treatment.**

As Red Cross and Red Crescent humanitarian organization, auxiliary to the public authorities and direct voice of the most vulnerable, we ask you, Mr. Chairman and distinguished Delegates, to listen our concern, welcoming the Rome Consensus Manifesto concrete proposals, by starting to ensure equitable and non-discriminatory access to treatment to all in need.

Thank you.