



Communiqué on Dr. Massimo Barra's visit to Tajikistan
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Dr. Barra's visit to Tajikistan: Promoting the humanitarian approach to drug policy and HIV prevention

"Tajikistan is the pioneer of the Central Asian region changing its attitude to drug users; starting to use humanitarian approach; returning the drug users into normal life and into the society; and understanding the importance of this step in fighting against the spread of the drugs, HIV and TB."

Dr. Massimo Barra, the President of Red Cross/Red Crescent Standing Commission praised the new approach and new steps taken by the Government of Tajikistan and the Red Crescent Society of Tajikistan with regard to injected drug users. He made his statement during a press-conference in Dushanbe on September 14, which concluded his five-day visit to Tajikistan.

Dr. Barra together with Mr. Fabio Patruno, Chairman of European Regional Network on HIV/TB, both from the Italian Red Cross, were invited to pay a visit to Tajikistan by the Red Crescent Society of Tajikistan (RCST) and the IFRC Country Representation to Tajikistan. The main purpose of the visit was to overview IFRC/RCST activities in Tajikistan with a special focus on newly-created Trust Points for injected drug users in this Central Asian republic; to overall analyse country situation on HIV and drug use; to advocate needs of drug users; to call the related agencies to increase their supports and to develop new projects for assisting drug users; and to consider the establishment of socio-psychological rehabilitation centre for drug users and people living with HIV in Badakhshan viloyat. During their visit, the guests were introduced to the activity of RCST Trust Points for injecting drug users in Kulob at Khatlon viloyat, Khorugh and Shughnon at Badakhshon viloyat.



Dr. Barra stressed that he was impressed by the job carried out by the Tajikistan Red Crescent at the Trust Points. In the framework of the RCST's harm reduction project six trust points are functioning in six districts of Badakhshon, Sughd and Khatlon viloyats. The full-fledged trust points function successfully and make a significant contribution to the national programme to combat HIV/AIDS in Tajikistan. The trust points conduct consultations among its targeted group – injecting drug users, provide socio-psychological assistance, exchange the syringes, disseminate the related medical information, distribute condoms, render first aid, etc. All trust points have been renovated and the staff of each trust point is well-trained. But since April 2011, due to cut-off the financial income, the project has been maintained only by distribution of medical materials and currently the personnel of the project continue their activity based only on the volunteering.

Dr. Barra said that *"they (RCST and IFRC) were able to build a bridge to fill the gap between the society and drug users without having financial support. Drug users trust them and this is the most significant step in the efforts to fight against the spread of the diseases. In order to success in this fight vulnerable people and groups should be reached, what is usually difficult to do as vulnerable*



groups escape the society scaring of being discriminated, stigmatized and marginalized. At the current stage Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is the only agency they trust to, they come to and they share their problems with to."

Dr. Barra passed the voice of the drug users he met in RCST's Trust Points to the officials during his meetings at the local and central levels. Dr. Barra conducted meetings with government officials in Kulob (city major Hamid Abdulloev); in Khorugh (Badakhshon viloyat head Qodir Qosim) and in Dushanbe (first deputy head of Tajikistan parliament Amirsho Miraliev), as well as with the medical officials - Tajikistan health deputy ministers Saidnazar Rahmonov

and A'zam Mirzoev and Badakhshan vilayat head of the health department Saidbek Davlatbekov. All the meetings were conducted on the air of frank and friendly discussion of drug users' conditions and the necessity of improving and continuation of the humanitarian approach to vulnerable people. Tajikistan officials thanked the Red Cross/Red Crescent for all its assistances to the people of the republic during the difficult periods and expressed their highly interest in strengthening the collaboration in future. Dr. Barra, in his turn, praised the changes in the Government policy with regard to drug users stressing on the substitution treatment with methadone he witnessed during his visit to Badakhshan narcological dispensary. In each meeting he managed to keep the positive track of the meeting despite of nature of the subject as it remains sensitive in this part of the world.

Honest discussion of the challenges Tajikistan Red Crescent staff and volunteers in headquarter and in the branches face was held during their meeting with Dr. Barra. Dr. Barra praised the efforts the local National Society already paid for the people in need, especially for drug users and said that he was impressed by the results of the job done by the local Red Crescent with IFRC support. He also was acknowledged with other activities of the RCST in Badakhshan region, such as providing First Aid and increasing the preparedness for disasters. He also enjoyed the first aid show prepared by the volunteers of Tavildara district branch in the east of the country and demonstrated in front of the guests and population of the city in a local theatre.



Dr. Barra visited a hospital and spoke to the personnel of the hospital in Saghirdasht, the gate to Badakhshan. He expressed his gratefulness for the warm welcome in each place he has been in this mountainous country saying that *"I have enjoyed the amazing beauty of Tajikistan, the traditional hospitality of the ordinary people despite their hard life. I am touched with the activities implemented by Red Cross/Red Crescent here and by the people volunteering their time and power for other human beings, who suffer."*

In his press-conferences in Khorugh, the center of Badakhshan, and in Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan, Dr. Barra stressed on the nice impressions he will take with him from Tajikistan. He expressed his willing to return to Tajikistan at a convenient time as he was asked continually during each meeting by drug users, RCST volunteers and staff, and Tajikistan officials including the first deputy chairman of the parliament Amirsho Miraliev.

Mr. Miraliev stressed that this year was a fruitful one for the relationships between the International Movement of Red Cross/Red Crescent and the Government of Tajikistan pointing to the visits of top-officials from the Movement to the country, including Bekele Geleta, IFRC Secretary General's visit on March and Dr. Barra and Mr. Pedruno's visit, as well as the Central Asian Red Crescent leadership forum on March; regional trainings on RDRT on May and on shelter and recovery on June.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is the world's largest volunteer-based humanitarian network, reaching 150 million people each year through its 186 member National Societies. Together, the IFRC acts before, during and after disasters and health emergencies to meet the needs and improve the lives of vulnerable people. It does so with impartiality as to nationality, race, gender, religious beliefs, class and political opinions. For more information, please visit www.ifrc.org. You can also connect with us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#) and [Flickr](#).

IFRC has been present in Tajikistan since 1994 to assist RCST in strengthening its skills and capacity to address the needs of the most vulnerable population. This has been done through the joint implementation of disaster management, health and care, organizational development, and migration programmes. The country representation provides technical and advisory support for the National Society in planning, implementation and monitoring of the programmes, as well as general supervision. For more information, please visit www.tajikistanrc.wordpress.com.