

**14th of November 2024**

**CND - Intersessional meeting**

**IFRC intervention**

Thank you Chair,

harm reduction is gaining worldwide more and more acceptance as a strategic approach but despite the growing implementation as an essential measure to reduce adverse health and social consequences for people with substance abuse disorders, still today, there is no generally accepted definition. On the contrary, in several countries and contexts harm reduction is subject to various political and ideological interpretations, leading to misunderstandings and confusion.

The lack of consensus and clarity has created unjustified fears about the effectiveness of harm reduction, negatively impacting public health outcomes.

If for somebody harm reduction is the first step towards treatment, for others is view as complicity with drug users whom purpose is not the recovery. As if those who support Harm Reduction were resigned to the drug consumption and have no hope of improvement of the general conditions of the user.

From our neutral and impartial perspective, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in its resolutions and guidelines recognized Harm Reduction as an essential

practice that aims to minimise the negative health and social impacts associated with drug use.

Years of experience and evidence showed that early intervention even when the subject does not have the will to stop, because of its sickness, is vital.

Avoid the point of non return, decrease the harmful consequences of drugs, allow the subject to stay alive and in the right condition to get a chance for a recovery path, are the essential steps of Harm Reduction.

The goal of the therapy must be compatible with the subject's conditions, it cannot demand the impossible, nor a rapid and forced detoxification. It must respect the objective conditions of the person's disease.

Humanitarian attitudes based on compassion and science should guide the health and ethical approach of harm reduction, as a first step towards an holistic application of the continuum of care.

How to return harm reduction to its ethical and humanitarian roots, setting aside ideological approaches? Is it possible to explore ways to build consensus among the international community on one interpretation and definition of this vital practices?

We believe that time has come!

*Massimo Barra*

*Chair of the RCRC*

*Partnership on Substance Abuse*