

## **Speech for the CND Intersessional Meeting 30 Sept. 2025**

*Delivered by Dr. Massimo Barra, on behalf of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)*

Treatment and health services for people who use drugs continue to fall short of the needs, and drug-related deaths are increasing

Thank you Chair

The item of today reminds us of a pressing reality: treatment and health services for people who use drugs continue to fall short of the needs, (and drug-related deaths are increasing). Addressing this challenge requires strengthening our collective commitment to health-based and humane responses. In this context, allow me to underline again the importance of *harm reduction* as an essential component of public health

Despite decades of discussions, the concept of *harm reduction* remains misunderstood and, at times, deliberately misrepresented. Some continue to suggest that harm reduction encourages drug use. This is a dangerous misconception. It is the responsibility of the scientific and international community to clarify its meaning, to eliminate doubts and political instrumentalization.

Harm reduction is, in fact, the **first step** of a comprehensive, person-centered health response. It is not an alternative to treatment, but the entry point to it.

Recently, some people have begun to speak of “*recovery-oriented harm reduction*”. We welcome this language, because it reflects a simple truth: all effective harm reduction activities are oriented towards therapy, dignity, and health. Harm Reduction itself include treatment measures such as methadone. No one’s objective is to keep people in a cycle of drug use. Our goal is

always to accompany drug users towards better health and well-being.

Ignoring this approach can have dangerous consequences.

We should also take into consideration that in too many places, punitive or coercive measures are still promoted in the name of “treatment.” Authorities are abusing this term to cover coercive strategies and practices that not only undermine human rights, but also weaken public health outcomes.

This is why we call on international organizations, Member States, and the scientific community to strengthen a **common understanding and shared language** on harm reduction and treatment.

Only by aligning our approaches can we ensure that people everywhere have equitable access to health services, considering

harm reduction the beginning of treatment, leading to follow-up with comprehensive treatment and recovery.

Thank you.