

Statement from the International Network of People who use Drugs

Global drug policy and the three international UN drug control conventions drive a global war on drugs that is, in reality, a war on people who use drugs. The current aims to achieve a ‘drug-free world’ through the criminalisation of people who use drugs are impossible ones: production of opium and cocaine are *increasing*, as are the number of people who use drugs, rising from 208 million in 2006, to 275 million ten years later. **Today, there are more drugs, and more people using drugs. Targets to abolish drug use are demonstrably unachievable, and global drug policy has altogether failed by its own metrics.**

Alongside the failures of global drug policy, hundreds of thousands of people who use drugs continue to be killed as a result of punitive laws and policies. More than **4,000 people have been executed** for drug offences since 2008. There have been **tens of thousands of extrajudicial killings** of people suspected of drug offences in the Philippines, not to mention killings in other jurisdictions, including Tanzania, Thailand, and Indonesia. Moreover, due to **a lack of harm reduction** and service provision there is an HIV prevalence of 17.8% and hepatitis C prevalence of 52% amongst people who inject drugs. Appropriate and fully realised harm reduction interventions – specifically needle and syringe programmes, drug consumption rooms, and opiate substitution programmes – as well as an end to the stigma and discrimination of people who use drugs, are imperative if the incidence of blood-borne infections is to decrease. But **harm reduction continues to be undermined**, opposed as ‘endorsing’ and ‘encouraging’ drug use. Only 10% of people worldwide who require harm reduction have access to these crucial services. Only around 8% receive opiate substitution, which also reduce the spread of blood-borne infections.

This lack of services, coupled with criminalisation and prohibition, have resulted in more than **200,000 drug-related deaths** a year. **Overdose deaths** contribute to between a third and a half of drug-related deaths. Last year, in the United States alone, overdose deaths exceeded 71,000. The vast majority of deaths are directly attributable **to the unregulated market of prohibition** and the lack of political support for harm reduction, including restricted access to naloxone and drug consumption rooms. **As with blood-borne infection prevalence, as with executions and extrajudicial killings, overdose deaths are due directly to criminalisation, prohibition, and social exclusion. These deaths are due to global drug policy.**

As world leaders gather at the Ministerial Segment and the 62nd Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND), held 14 – 22nd of March, 2019 to “take stock of the implementation of the commitments made to jointly address and counter the world drug problem, in the light of the 2019 target date”, we underscore the commitment of member states to respect, protect, and promote all human rights, fundamental freedoms and the inherent dignity of all individuals in the implementation of drug policies. **As people who use drugs, we emphasise the well-demonstrated causal link between the criminalisation of people who use drugs and impacts upon the health and wellbeing** of people who use drugs. It is a disregard for the human rights and wellbeing of people who use drugs in the context of drug policy-making and discourse that has resulted in the cost of countless lives.

Decriminalisation of people who use drugs and of drug use is a principal substantive step to be taken in realising the health and rights of people who use drugs. Decriminalisation, as opposed to punitive prohibition, has been recommended by the WHO, and UNAIDS. Furthermore, we advocate for the **meaningful involvement** of those who are most impacted by global drug policy: **communities of people who use drugs**. It is only through our involvement that the policies and laws most conducive to promoting health and defending human rights are to be realised. In constructing a ‘world drug problem’, global drug policy has created a human rights catastrophe. It is current drug policies that are the problem, and people who use drugs who have borne the brunt of the current misguided approach. We urge member states to decriminalise people who use drugs, and to listen to those to whom policy pertains: people who use drugs.

The way forward must be defined by a commitment to the inalienable human rights and dignity of people who use drugs. This cannot be suspended in the pursuit of a “drug-free” world. Under the principle of common and shared responsibility, we remind member states of their human rights obligations under international law. Finally, in safe-guarding the future, the critical role of communities of people who use drugs should be formally acknowledged in order to ensure that no one is left behind.