

The European Commission supports the Rome Consensus Europe Conference (26-27 March 2009)

The Red Cross National Societies of twenty European countries launch the second phase of the Rome Consensus towards the implementation of a Humanitarian Drug Policy in Europe

MADRID – The Spanish Red Cross is hosting the Rome Consensus Europe Conference in Madrid from the 26-27th March 2009. The Conference, titled “Rising to the Challenge of Drug Use in Europe”, is an initiative of the Rome Consensus for a Humanitarian Drug Policy, supported by the European Commission and the International Council on Security and Development (ICOS – formerly known as The Senlis Council).

After five regional meetings and a World Congress in Barcelona last year, the Rome Consensus is moving to a new level of action. It will now directly mobilise the experience and networks of the Red Cross to implement projects and take concrete actions in the field of humanitarian drug policy.

The Rome Consensus Europe Conference will bring together twenty National Societies of Red Cross from across Europe, representatives from the European Commission, the World Health Organisation, and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), and other leading practitioners to exchange best practices in prevention, treatment and care, and to explore concrete ways for National Societies to contribute to the implementation of drug policy responses in Europe.

“The commitment and work of the Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies in local communities gives us better access to vulnerable groups. Therefore, we must put ourselves at the forefront of drug prevention and harm reduction,” says Juan Manuel Suárez del Toro Rivero, President of the Spanish Red Cross and President of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC).

“This initiative has grown immensely and now plays a vital role for Europe’s approach to drugs because it focuses on awareness, social advocacy and action, representing a further step forward in our efforts to humanize drug policy,” adds Dr Massimo Barra, Vice President of the Standing Commission of the Red Cross and Red Crescent and Co-Chair of the Rome Consensus.

The Rome Consensus as an integral part of a European drug policy

In its fourth year, the Rome Consensus initiative has already proved an invaluable vehicle for the promotion of a European model for drug policy, led by the European Commission. With the support of the Commission, the Rome Consensus can now implement some of the initiatives and concrete proposals it has been developing over the past few years, and become an integral part of the European drug policy.

“Benefiting from this important European framework, our objective is to work closely with the European National Societies of the Red Cross to lead the way towards a humanitarian drug policy based on reason and compassion that generates action, free from ideology, force, stigmatisation and discrimination,” said Emmanuel Reinert, Executive Director of ICOS.

“Through this unique opportunity presented by the European Commission, the Red Cross-Red Crescent Movement can create a very real and direct impact on reducing the suffering of vulnerable people affected by drug use in Europe,” Reinert added.

By participating in the Rome Consensus Europe framework, National Societies have the opportunity to engage with the European Commission regarding key drug policy legislation, exchange best practices, and receive training and assistance in programme implementation.

Following the conference, representatives of the European National Societies' Youth will meet on the 28th of March to discuss concrete ways for them to develop, exchange and implement initiatives and best practices to tackle drug-related suffering in the region.

Drug use in Europe is still a major health-related challenge. Cannabis use remains very high and cocaine use continues to increase. In addition, Europe remains among the biggest production centres of amphetamine-type stimulants around the world.

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