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The Rome Consensus approach

The Rome Consensus for Humanitarian Drug Policy aims at bringing drug policy to the forefront of social concerns; acknowledging the suffering caused by drug use and current drug policies and advocating for a comprehensive public health, harm reduction and humanitarian approach to the drug problem.

The Consensus recognises and reinforces the Red Cross/Red Crescent's unique auxiliary role in encouraging policy makers nationally and internationally to adopt an innovative and humanitarian approach to this key public health issue.

The Rome Consensus is a unique opportunity to establish a new commitment to a humanitarian drug policy based on reason and compassion that generates action, free from ideology, force, stigmatization and discrimination

The Rome Consensus created in December 2005 by 22 National Societies is now a network integrated by 120 Red Cross and Red Crescent organizations, including Maldives Island, who signed the declaration two weeks ago in Nairobi.

We contributed to create a new room for discussion on drug substance abuse, introducing the humanitarian concept to the UN organizations and to the governments: we advocated on behalf of the people discriminated and stigmatized everywhere, recognizing that the drug users needs help and compassion

A humanitarian drug policy it is both an approach and a practice. As an approach, humanitarian drug policy understands the drug problem as a human reality, intrinsically connected to public health and social development concerns. It is based on rationality, compassion and the non-stigmatization of drug users.

In practice, humanitarian drug policy takes a realistic and non-judgmental approach to drug consumption, trafficking and production: **a humanitarian drug policy takes care of drug users using treatment and public health measures**, such as clean needle exchange or methadone substitution treatment to help them combat their addiction.

It empowers drug users to take control of their addiction and their lives, restoring their self esteem and aiming to reintegrate them into employment and wider social life.

In short, humanitarian drug policy is a realistic, compassionate and efficient way of dealing with the drug problem.

Changes in the drug policy worldwide

It is important to mention now the most important changes occurred in 2008 and 2009:

First: The United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, who was a young volunteer in the Korean Red Cross Youth program, said in the World Drug Report issued on the 26 of June 2008, International Day against Drugs, that:

“no one should be stigmatized or discriminated against, because of their dependence on drugs”,

which is the first time that UN head speaks with the voice of his heart, probably inspired by the Red Cross Fundamental Principles and the Rome Consensus call to establish a new commitment to a Humanitarian Drug Policy based on reason and compassion that generates action, free from ideology, force stigmatization and discrimination.

Ban Ki-moon also said:

“There is a growing consensus, both within communities and among states, that drug control is a shared responsibility in which we all play a part”.

Second: Antonio Costa, Director of the UNODC quote in the 2008 report:

“progress is needed in three areas:

First, public health – the first principle of drug control –should be brought back to centre stage.

Currently, the amount of resources and political support for public security and law enforcement far outweigh those devoted to public health. This must be re-balanced.

Drug dependence is an illness that should be treated like any other. More resources are needed to prevent people from taking drugs, to treat those who are dependent, and to reduce the adverse health and social consequences of drug abuse.

Second, drug control should be looked at in the larger context of crime prevention and the rule of law in order to cut links between drug trafficking, organized crime, corruption and terrorism.

Third, protecting public security and safeguarding public health should be done in a way that upholds human rights and human dignity.

On the year's 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides us with a useful reminder of the inalienable rights to life and a fair trial".

Mr. Costa also said:

"Although drugs kill, we should not kill because of drugs".

This is important, because it is the same humanitarian approach proposed by the RC/RC in the International Conference in 1986 and for the Rome Consensus members since 2005.

Third: In USA the Congress decided recently to create a Commission with the mandate to revise the drug enforcement approach implemented during two decades by the American government: they said that after spending more than 15.000 million dollars, the results are not satisfactory and the consumption of heroine and cocaine is growing.

Discrimination and stigmatisation in Europe is growing

For many many years I said that **"stigma kills more than drug abuse"**; for that reason I would like to mention a recent research done by the Fundamental Rights Agency- FRA, part of the European Union, which was issued on the 9th of December 2009, with the following results:

"This is the first ever EU-wide survey of immigrant and ethnic minority groups' experiences of discrimination and victimization in everyday life. Addressing the lack of reliable and comparable data on minorities in many EU countries, the survey examines experiences of discriminatory treatment, racist crime victimization, awareness of rights, and reporting of complaints. EU-MIDIS involved face-to-face interviews with 23,500 persons from selected immigrant and ethnic minority groups in all 27 Member States of the European Union.

High levels of discrimination, racist crime and victimization

The ethnic minority and immigrant groups interviewed described high levels of discriminatory treatment and criminal victimization, including racially motivated crime.

Of the nine areas of discrimination in everyday life looked at in the survey, discrimination in employment emerged as the most significant area for discriminatory

*treatment. The results show that discrimination in two main areas of life, namely **education and employment** is particularly problematic for some groups.*

This result is alarming as education and paid employment hold the key to integration and social inclusion, representing the 'prerequisite' for leading a dignified, free and confident life".

For us as a part of the RC/RC Movement, the results of the study are a clear indicator that the problem is growing in Europe and probably in other parts of the world.

I believe that discrimination, stigma and repression affect minorities, immigrants and also drug users, which are considered by the Europeans not as part of the ordinary population, but as a problem to be solve by the police and the states.

Drug users are not seen as people suffering, not as vulnerable individuals with the right to have access to public health services: they are **sinners; they are guilty and must be punished!!**

When they enter the prisons, they are sick people needing help: when they leave the prisons they are graduated as criminals, because the system has no choices, no options and no alternatives for them.

The emphasis in repression creates collateral damages: corruption, discrimination, lack of liberties, violation of human rights, and abuse of power and diminished the capacity to react and to protect the people in danger.

Fifty years of tackling the drugs issue through the criminal justice system, focusing on law enforcement and punishment, has failed to achieve the intended goal of eliminating or even reducing the world's drug problem.

Drug use, production and trafficking are all steadily rising, bringing with them, human and economic disaster and suffering.

Challenges for the RC/RC Movement

The people worldwide believe that the RC/RC Movement is an humanitarian, independent organization and for that reason individuals living on the edge, minorities, immigrants and drug users also accept their services and allowed their volunteers to maintain a relation with them.

Despite of that important fact, internally we have to fight the stigma associated to people without power, marginalized and discriminated due their sexual orientation, culture and strange behavior.

I hope that the new generation will help the organization to bridge the internal gap and to work with all the people suffering, no matter what!!

Objectives of the European Seminar

This two-day seminar intends to scale-up some of the best practices currently in place in Red Cross-Red Crescent National Societies towards the broader network of the Movement.

In three practical sessions, focusing on drug prevention, treatment and harm reduction, concrete examples of best practices will be used to come up with a set of benchmarks that can be used for wider implementation within the Red Cross-Red Crescent network.

The resulting benchmarks will be subsequently published and shared with all European National Societies.

It's important that in this event, we have the participation of 19 NS from Europe and many participants from different associated organizations.

El abuso de sustancias en la Unión Europea

En Madrid en Marzo de 2009 nos reunimos para analizar la situación actual en los países que hacen parte de la Unión Europea y proponer acciones conjuntas en las áreas de prevención, tratamiento, reducción de daños y sobre como influenciar las decisiones de los Estados respecto a la ampliación de los servicios públicos de salud a las personas que abusan de sustancias.

De acuerdo con el informe 2009, del Observatorio Europeo sobre la drogadicción, cuya sede está en Lisboa, millones de habitantes de la UE usan drogas regularmente tales como cannabis, cocaína, éxtasis, anfetaminas y opiáceos.

La Unión Europea reconoce que la drogadicción es una de las mayores amenazas para la salud y el bienestar de los ciudadanos europeos y en particular de los jóvenes.

El **derecho a la salud** está reconocido en los **principios** fundadores de la Unión Europea que constituyen la base de su política en materia de drogas, tales como:

- El respeto por la dignidad humana
- El respeto por las libertades individuales
- La democracia y la solidaridad
- Actuar de acuerdo con las leyes y los derechos humanos

Este objetivo está totalmente en línea con los fundamentos de la Política Humanitaria sobre el abuso de sustancias, mencionado en la declaración del Consenso de Roma Europa, cuyo objetivo clave es movilizar las Sociedades Nacionales de la Cruz Roja y Media Luna Roja de Europa, con el ánimo de promover estilos de vida saludables para los individuos y las comunidades, facilitando asimismo el tratamiento y rehabilitación de quienes usan drogas.

Como se puede apreciar, existe una gran cantidad de actores interesados en el tema del abuso de sustancias en Europa, además de las Sociedades Nacionales de la Cruz Roja y Media Luna, lo que es muy positivo porque muestra que hay una gran capacidad para responder a los desafíos humanitarios que este grave problema presenta.

Pero, por eso mismo, es necesario aumentar nuestra coordinación y comunicación evitando asimismo la duplicación de esfuerzos.

Agradecimientos

Quisiera renovar mis agradecimientos a la Unión Europea por su apoyo financiero y técnico, a ICOS y muy en especial a su director don Emmanuel Reinert por facilitar la organización de este seminario, a Villa Maraini por su excelente cooperación, a la Cruz Roja Italiana que siempre nos brinda su generoso apoyo, a la UNODC por su interés y solidaridad y a todos los participantes que han aceptado acompañarnos de nuevo en esta ocasión.

I wish you all the best in this important seminar.

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