

## **Draft Speech Official Dinner**

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### **Introduction by Emmanuel Reinert**

Ladies and Gentlemen: We will shortly have the pleasure of listening to Ms Norine MacDonald QC, the President of the Network of European Foundations' Mercator Fund. Ms MacDonald founded The Senlis Council in 2002, which as you know is the sponsor and co-chair of the Rome Consensus.

Ms MacDonald is a former Canadian lawyer, and now through her work with The Senlis Council she works in Europe, Afghanistan and Brazil. As an acknowledged international media spokesperson and expert on global drug policy, I am sure her words tonight will provide insight and inspiration for your endeavours with the Rome Consensus.

Ladies and Gentlemen: Ms Norine MacDonald QC.

## **Norine MacDonald**

Ladies and Gentlemen, as a President of the Network of European Foundations' Mercator Fund, I'm very happy to be here with you all tonight. I would like to start this talk with some thanks.

I thank of course the Spanish Red Cross and its President Don Juan Manuel Suarez del Toro Rivero for organising this Congress.

Our thanks also go to the Centre for Cooperation in the Mediterranean, The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and of course the National Societies' and the volunteers, youth and dedicated staff who have made the success of this event possible.

It's a real honor to be at Pedralbes Palace for this dinner; many thanks to the Catalanian authorities for enabling us to be in this beautiful and historical place.

Finally, we would also like to express our gratitude to Dr. Massimo Barra, President of Italian Red Cross and President of the Rome Consensus. We thank him for his commitment to helping people who are suffering because of drugs. The friendship and inspiration of Dr Barra, combined with his commitment to end the discrimination and stigmatization of drug users, is central to both the existence and the success of the Rome Consensus. His unfaltering dedication to this cause has been an

inspiration to us and provides the foundations for our partnership with the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement.

**Dr Barra has often said that stigma kills and that indifference and discrimination kill more than the abuse of substances.**

**The human stigmatization and suffering created by drugs is far-reaching. Sadly, a big share of this suffering is caused as much by the current policies as the substances themselves.**

**This suffering does not end with the users; it affects their immediate families and communities at large.**

**Everywhere in the world, even in countries that uphold human rights, drug users are still denied basic citizen's rights. Drug users are humiliated, bullied, discriminated and treated more as criminals than as sick people. Public opinion and well thinking people are often accomplices of this stigmatization**

**Moreover, stigmatization and lack of care for drug victims is not only unwise and destructive for the users themselves, but also for the communities in which they live.**

By being involved in the Rome Consensus, you have shown that you understand this vital point. I convey my heartfelt admiration for the work you are carrying out with the Consensus. It is truly a privilege to sponsor this and other Rome Consensus events and initiatives.

We have followed the development of the Rome Consensus over the past year and we are extremely impressed by the commitment and courage of the 106 National Societies which are signatories to the Consensus.

Looking at the success stories already engendered by the Rome Consensus activities, we believe that the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement's commitment can provide the impetus needed to really change the future of drug policy. Perhaps the most notable example of this success being the Convention recently adopted by the Council of Europe, promoting a public health approach to Europe's drug crisis.

The Red Cross/Red Crescent movement can provide the link between effective, humanitarian and compassionate initiatives and their implementation as part of national or regional frameworks: This is possible because of the unique status of the Movement combined with its understanding of the human condition and its non judgmental, non-discriminatory approach.

The Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement understands that change is needed. The suffering engendered by drugs and the failure of the current policy make this change long overdue.

Despite your very different drug problems, different resources and different cultural or financial constraints, the fact that you are here in Barcelona shows that you realise how important the drugs issue is. It shows that you believe, as we do, that the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement can make a difference. The Rome Consensus provides an example of how commitment to a drug policy based on humanitarian values can have a positive impact and provoke change.

By bringing drugs and drug policy to the forefront of people's awareness, the Consensus can change the way that the public at large, civil society and policy makers think and talk about drugs. **Changing the discourse that surrounds drug policy is the first step to changing policy itself.**

Drugs and drug addiction represent a huge challenge to our societies and as a consequence require a structured response. A framework is needed that clearly lays out which health principles and practices should form the basis of every drug policy: One which provides the legal ground to allow societies to tackle their drug problems. This framework is a humanitarian drug policy.

It is clear that within the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement you understand the humanitarian and public health aspects of the drug

problem and that you are not going to wait for the International Status Quo to change before putting innovative policies into practice.

Through the Rome Consensus, the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement is showing leadership in the global drug crisis. We feel privileged to be part of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement becoming a Centre of Expertise on Humanitarian drug policy. The Humanitarian Drug Policy Handbook that you are working on here in Barcelona will be a vital tool in the future development of a clearly defined international humanitarian drug policy. This important work will fill a vacuum and I congratulate you on your commitment to this seminal work.

We hope that we can add value to your efforts by offering practical help and policy knowledge and continuing to provide sponsorship to assist you in your endeavours.

With your commitment, your courage and conviction and by continuing to work together, we are sure that you will succeed in making the development of a humanitarian drug policy a reachable goal in all of your respective countries and regions.

We are privileged to be with you here are proud to join with all of you as you go forward with the new initiatives of the Rome Consensus.

Thank you