

NEWSLETTER

The Rome Consensus Participation in the 12th annual meeting of ERNA in Belgrade, Serbia



In December, the Rome Consensus participated in the 12th Annual ERNA meeting. Jane Francis from the Rome Consensus Coordination team interviews Oscar Zuluaga, Special Representative for the Rome Consensus for a Humanitarian Drug Policy, who attended the meeting in Belgrade.

Q. JF: You attended the 12th Conference on HIV/AIDS, organised by the European Red Cross Network (ERNA) in Belgrade in December 2008. Can you give us some background on ERNA and the meeting?

A. OZ: ERNA – the European Red Cross Network on HIV/AIDS and TB - was created by Dr. Massimo Barra in 1996 with the aim of tackling the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Europe.

ERNA has an annual meeting of its members – there are now 40 National Societies (NS) who have joined. Initially, the Conference had been planned to take place at the end of September in Tbilisi, but due to the conflict in Georgia in August 2008, the venue was moved to Belgrade, Serbia.

Q. JF: What were the main issues of discussion at the meeting?

A. OZ: We were there to hear the report of the Federation's participation in the World HIV/AIDS Conference in Mexico, August 2008, to discuss partnerships between National Societies, involvement of youth in the activities, global alliances led by the Secretariat of the Federation and the development of the *Rome Consensus Europe* initiative.

Q. JF: Tell us some more about *Rome Consensus Europe*.

A. OZ: As your readers may have already heard, the Rome Consensus now benefits from the support of the European Commission. I gave a presentation of *Rome Consensus Europe's* objectives and guidelines to the delegates in Serbia, who were invited to share their comments on the endeavour.

The aim of *Rome Consensus Europe* is to encourage Red Cross National Societies to develop health-based programmes to tackle drug use in their country drawing on the European Union's Drug Strategy and Action Plans.

Q. JF: what are the links between ERNA and *Rome Consensus Europe*?



A. OZ: The Rome Consensus aims to address drug-related suffering in Europe from a health perspective and to encourage and provide support for NS to tackle the physical and mental health issues caused by drugs in the most effective way possible. This is where the overlap with ERNA comes: injecting drug use is one of the most “effective” and now most common ways of transmitting the HIV virus. The Rome Consensus aims to encourage NS to understand and hopefully implement the initiatives that can help limit the spread of HIV.



Oscar Zuluaga

These can be large or small projects: for example, they can range from big projects like the provision of needle exchange programmes or methadone substitution treatment, both of which tackle the problem directly, to the development of support networks for drug users, which can provide drug users with information on how to prevent the transmission of the virus, or information campaigns for young people.

Both ERNA and *Rome Consensus Europe* aim to provide NS with tools, ideas and information with which they can tackle the suffering caused by drugs in their own countries.

The specific aims of *Rome Consensus Europe* are to identify and promote National Society activities on drug-related issues, to provide training and exchanges of know-how between National Societies, and to provide advocacy support to National Societies in order to allow them to promote and to implement a health-based approach to drugs with their own governments.

Q. JF: What are the next steps for *Rome Consensus Europe*?

A. OZ: : We are currently working on a set of specifically European Drug Policy Guidelines which will compliment the Guidelines adopted at the World Congress in Barcelona last year. These will aim to help NS better understand the provisions made by the EU for drug policy and will hopefully serve to provide them with ideas and initiatives they can use in their own countries.

Our other main objective is to be a platform for the exchange of ideas between NS in Europe – by bringing NS together to talk about what they do and what works in different countries, we hope to encourage NS to try out new ideas and generate new initiatives to address this human disaster. With this objective in mind, the Rome Consensus is co-organising a European Conference in Madrid, hosted by the Spanish Red Cross.

JF: Thank you Oscar - We'll be reporting more on the Madrid Conference in the next newsletters.

Next month, the Rome Consensus coordination team will be talking to the Spanish Red Cross about their initiative to tackle the drug issue.

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