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The Rome Consensus Europe Conference: Rising to the Challenge of Drug Use in Europe

The Rome Consensus Europe Conference, *Rising to the Challenge of Drug Use in Europe* hosted in Madrid by the Spanish Red Cross on the 26-27 March 2009 was an initiative of *Rome Consensus Europe*, supported by the European Commission.

Background to the Conference

The Rome Consensus' European Chapter - *Rome Consensus Europe* is designed to encourage the Red Cross-Red Crescent (RC/RC) National Societies (NS) in EU Member States, candidate countries and Western Balkan countries to prioritise drug policy activities in their work and to be knowledgeable on and endorse the EU Drugs Strategy (2005-2012) and Action Plan (2009-2012), taking inspiration from these documents and incorporating them into their activities in the drug field.

The RC/RC Movement offers a unique opportunity on a European scale to contribute to the implementation of the EU Drugs Strategy and Action Plan thanks to its unique access both to high level policy makers and its capillary reach among young, vulnerable communities and civil society at large.

During this two-day conference, attendees had the opportunity to learn about the European Drugs Strategy and Action Plans and share experiences in the field of drug policy and drug response.

The Conference was also an occasion for the National Societies of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in Europe, European Union (EU) institution representatives and other leading practitioners to exchange best practices in prevention, treatment and care, and explore concrete ways for National Societies to contribute to drug policy responses in Europe.

National Societies also had 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 met 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.

Opening the Conference

Ms Isabel Noguer Zambrano, Deputy Director of Institutional Relations at the Spanish Ministry of Health opened the Conference with her presentation on Spain's National Drug Policy. Ms Zambrano stressed that the Spanish approach to drug use and addiction is primarily a public health and public security issue, underlining that in 2008, 3.5% of deaths in Europe, between the ages of 15 and 35 were due to the consumption of drugs. Moreover the consumption of opiates is of major concern in Europe.



Ms Manuela Cabero, Vice President of the Spanish Red Cross¹

Ms Cabero emphasised the need to manage the problem of drug use from a public health perspective and strengthen the advocacy role of civil society in drug policy development, underlining the importance of preventing and reducing drug related harm and drug use.

Ms Cabero highlighted the importance of using the *Rome Consensus Europe* Conference to improve methodologies and raise awareness between various actors, as well as develop support the implementation of the European Strategy on Drugs (2005-2012) and its Action Plans.

Another of the meeting's objectives underlined by Ms Cabero was the mobilisation of the youth organisations of Red Cross National Societies towards the goals of the EU Drugs Strategy and Action Plans and the provision of a forum through which young people can express their interests and needs regarding the drugs issue.

¹ Ms Cabero attended the Conference on behalf of Dr Juan Manuel Suarez del Toro Rivero, President of the Spanish Red Cross

Ms Cabero called on National Societies to encourage all the National Societies of the International Movement, to join the Rome Consensus and make drug use a priority in their outreach. They must use their Auxiliary role to governments to maximum effect in order to keep their promise of helping those who are most vulnerable, using their knowledge and experience in the field, and developing advocacy tools with political decision makers.

Session I: The Rome Consensus and the EU: an opportunity for making a difference in drug policy in Europe

Dr Massimo Barra, Vice President Standing Commission Red Cross and Red Crescent, Co-chair Rome Consensus

Dr Barra stressed to participants that the *Rome Consensus Europe* has a vital role to play in helping National Societies to develop effective drug response programmes. He underlined that the purpose of the Rome Consensus Europe Conference in Madrid was to present the situation in Europe, where, according to the European Observatory on Drug Addiction Report, thirty-two million people use drugs regularly and the EU has recognised that drug addiction is one of the most important threats for the health of European citizens, especially youth.

To address this, the EU has elaborated a new strategy to achieve the highest level of health protection, welfare and social cohesion.

Dr Barra reminded the audience that the right to health is recognised as a founding principle of the European Union and that European drug policy is based on:

- Respect for human dignity
- Respect of individual freedom
- Democracy and Solidarity

Dr Barra underlined the important role played by the European institutions, notably the European Commission in developing a comprehensive and public health based approach to drug response, respecting all these principles.

Mr Emmanuel Reinert, Co-chair Rome Consensus

Mr Reinert underlined how the Rome Consensus has grown during the past three years, moving from an initial period of defining the drug challenges ahead to clearly defining a humanitarian approach. Drug use and drug addiction present a complex and multidimensional problem and in just a few years, the Rome Consensus has organised meetings worldwide to provide support to the Red Cross in this field.

Mr Reinert went on to note that the approach of the Rome Consensus is in complete accord with the approach of the EU in its EU Drugs strategy and Action Plans and that *Rome Consensus Europe* now aims to support National Societies in implementing their strategies to “make a difference”, helping them to represent the gold standard of drug response implementation in Europe and to demonstrate to the EU community that the network is powerful in this field.

Mr Timo Jetsu, Anti Drugs Policy, Directorate of Justice, Freedom and Security, European Commission
Mr Jetsu provided participants with an overview of the position and role of the EU with regards to drugs, explaining that the European Union does not have the mandate for working actively on drug policy in its Member States. Mr Jetsu underlined that there is no time for ideological debate: what Europe needs is to be realistic and pragmatic.

Session II: The European Dimension of National Societies’ work in drug prevention treatment and care

Mr Timo Jetsu, Anti Drugs Policy, Directorate of Justice, Freedom and Security, European Commission
The civil society forum on drugs in EU²

Mr Jetsu provided participants with an overview of the EU Drugs Strategy and Action Plans, underlining the importance of the Civil Society Forum on Drugs organised by the European Commission.

Mr Jetsu noted that the forum should:

- Represent a wide variety of views in a balanced way;
- Be inclusive rather than exclusive, with transparent selection criteria;
- Have a clear mandate, well defined agendas, transparent procedures and achievable work plans with real input into the policymaking process;
- Be able to ensure continuity of the work and at the same time be flexible enough to adapt to changes;
- Have adequate financial and human resources.

The Civil Society Forum on Drugs serves as a platform for exchanges of views and information between the Commission and civil society organisations in the EU, candidate countries and, as appropriate, European neighbourhood policy countries.

The European Action on Drugs³

The EAD aims to raise awareness among European citizens on the potential negative impact of drugs, and risks of drug abuse, encourage support and solidarity,

² Please visit this site for more details of Mr Jetsu’s presentation, <http://www.romeconsensus.net/modules/europe/Events>
³ <http://www.romeconsensus.net/modules/europe/Events> for more details over Mr Jetsu’s presentation

promote healthy lifestyles and increase people's sense of responsibility.

It aims to encourage ordinary citizens to commit to making a difference and exerting influence in their own environment, to learn from and to share experience, to mobilise civil society to working in partnerships and establish relations based on trust and solidarity, and to create or strengthen networks of responsible and committed citizens as well as public and private bodies.



Mr Jetsu informed participants that the launch for the EAD would take place on 26th of June 2009 in Brussels. During the launch, some organisations and individuals will become the first signatories.

Mr Toni Bruel i Carreras General Coordinator, Spanish Red Cross

Spanish Red Cross activities in the field of drug addiction⁴

Mr Carreras underlined that the mission of the Spanish Red Cross is to be close to vulnerable people at the national and international level through preventive actions, health care, rehabilitation and development, mainly carried out by volunteers.

Mr Carreras traced the history of the Spanish Red Cross in the field of addiction back to the end of 1970s. In this period the Spanish Red Cross started its first programme which aimed to provide help to people with alcohol addiction and to patients that needed psychopharmacological treatment. Then, in 1979, faced with a large increase in drug use in Spain, the first centre focussing on drug addiction problems was created by the Spanish Red Cross.

Following the opening of the centre, service provision expanded and included new therapies focusing on the psycho-social needs of patients, but also aiming to combine drug consumption issues with HIV and AIDS.

In the 1990s the Spanish Red Cross geared many of its services to drug users with a high level of social and

psychological vulnerability. At the same time, the Spanish Red Cross started to provide substitution treatment with Methadone and developed harm reduction activities introducing a range of low threshold services.

In 2000 the Spanish Red Cross' intervention was expanded to include programmes to promote the social inclusion of treated patients. Now, in 2009, the activities of the Spanish Red Cross in the field of drug addiction are focused on promoting services based on social proximity.

Principles and Intervention approach

Mr Carreras noted that the activities developed by the Spanish Red Cross aim to promote humanitarian drug policies and they are focused on public health issues. The Spanish Red Cross has a community-based approach which aims to reinforce social networks through the work of volunteers, advocacy and awareness-raising campaigns. He stressed that the mission of the Spanish Red Cross is to fight stigmatisation and discrimination through communication targeted to the wider population.

Mr Aitor Murciano Moreno, National Director of Youth, Spanish Red Cross

Prevention, a challenge for the youth⁵

The Spanish Red Cross Youth was created in 1970 to promote associative activities and to offer a way for the young to actively participate within the Red Cross programmes.

The objectives of the Spanish Red Cross Youth are:

- To improve the quality of life of children and young people;
- Develop projects with young and children living in difficult/ high social risk contexts;
- Facilitate active participation of the volunteers, promoting active and critical citizenship.

Health Promotion and Education Programme

Mr Moreno provided participants with details of the Spanish Red Cross Youth's programme on health promotion and education and its aims to inform and promote a change in habits and behaviours among children and young people, covering drugs and other health issues such as nutrition, sexual health, HIV/AIDS, new addictions (associated with new technologies), accident prevention and first aid.

⁴ For more details of Mr Bruel i Carreras presentation please visit, <http://www.romeconsensus.net/modules/europe/Events>

⁵ For more details of Mr Murciano Moreno's presentation please visit, <http://www.romeconsensus.net/modules/europe/Events>

Dr Fabio Patruno, Training project Coordinator, Italian Red Cross, Vice President ERNA

Villa Maraini Training Project⁶

Dr Patruno gave Conference participants an overview of the services provided by Villa Maraini, noting in particular that since 1992 Villa Maraini has provided a number of street services as this has proved to be the most effective way in reaching people previously excluded from access to treatment.

Dr Patruno underlined that between 1992 and 2008 the Street Unit has been in regular contact with 877, 970 people: 797, 052 contacts were with drug users, 116, 771 were with new drug users, 14.6% of drug users were female, and 2.7% (2,243) of drug users were foreigners. During the same period, the Street Unit provided 879, 784 clean syringes and collected 477, 895 used syringes.

Dr Patruno stressed his belief that drug use problems cannot be solved by criminal justice initiatives. Punitive action drives the people most in need of prevention and care services underground. Villa Maraini's approach is based on peer education and active involvement of drug users and other organisations already working in the field and it is an effective, proven method for reaching people who use drugs in their own environment.

Ms Viginie Streit Guérinel, International Relations, French Red Cross

Harm reduction Activities of the French Red Cross: joint project on harm reduction in Ukraine⁷

Ms Guérinel highlighted that Ukraine has the most severe HIV/AIDS epidemic among the adult population in Europe with a prevalence of 1.63%. About forty-one percent of new cases of HIV infection are related to the injection of drugs. This is why the French, Italian and Ukrainian Red Cross set up a harm reduction project there.

In Ukraine there are an estimated 400, 000 IDUs and, to achieve a realistic impact on the HIV epidemic about thirty percent of IDUs – 120, 000 patients - should have access to a substitution treatment. Currently about 2,000 patients are on substitution treatment.

The French and Italian Red Cross support a syringe exchange programme, and a home-based care and substitution therapy. Training programmes also aim to build communication with the IDUs community to promote the distribution of syringes, condoms, information materials, medical and social counselling,

HIV testing, and risk behaviour prevention. The project is being developed in partnership with local NGOs, National NGOs, state partners like the Ministry of Health of Ukraine and the Regional AIDS Centre.

Session III: Joining forces for health-based solutions to drug related suffering in Europe

Mr Thomas Kattau, Executive Secretary a.i., Pompidou Group, Council of Europe

Mr Kattau fully explained to participants the role of the Council of Europe and the Pompidou Group in the field of drugs. The Council of Europe was founded in 1949 and seeks to develop, throughout Europe, common and democratic principles based on the European Convention on Human Rights and other reference texts on the protection of individuals.

The Council of Europe aims to find common solutions to the challenges facing European Society and aims to consolidate democratic stability in Europe by backing political, legislative and constitutional reform.



Ms Elisabeth Saenz, Expert, Prevention Treatment and Rehabilitation Unit, UN Office on Drugs and Crime, UNODC

UNODC-WHO Joint Programme on Drug Dependence Treatment and Care⁸

Ms Saenz reminded the audience that substance abuse and dependence is a public health, developmental and security problem both in industrialised and developing countries. It is associated with health problems, poverty, violence, criminal behaviour and social exclusion. Drug use is one of the top twenty risk factors to health worldwide and among the top ten in developed countries.

Drug use disorders are associated with increased risk of development of many other diseases and health conditions, including HIV and AIDS, hepatitis, suicides, overdose deaths, tuberculosis and cardiovascular diseases. Ms Saenz noted that one of the most severe consequences of drug use is the spread of HIV and Hepatitis: Drug use, especially injecting drug use, is closely linked to HIV

⁶ For more details of Mr Patruno's presentation please visit, <http://www.romeconsensus.net/modules/europe/Events>

⁷ For more details of Ms Streit Guerinél's presentation please visit, <http://www.romeconsensus.net/modules/europe/Events>

⁸ For more details of Ms Saenz's presentation please visit, <http://www.romeconsensus.net/modules/europe/Events>

transmission through the sharing needles, but also in relationship to the risky behaviours of non-injecting drug users. In this regard, data on the size of the IDU population from 130 countries indicates that there are 13.2 million IDUs worldwide.

Sharing of contaminated injection equipment is a major route of HIV transmission in many regions, including Eastern Europe, Central, South and South East Asia and some countries in Latin America. Ms Saenz underscored that up to 10% of global HIV infections are due to unsafe injecting drug use.

In spite of the accumulated evidence of effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of treatment of drug dependence, large numbers of people suffering from drug dependence have no access to humane, ethical and effective treatment. Imprisonment often becomes the only alternative for those who suffer from drug dependence and have no access to treatment and rehabilitation services in the community, either because they do not exist or because they are not accessible for different reasons, including costs and admission restrictions.

Often existing treatment options, either in health care or law enforcement systems, do not respond to the Through its Joint Programme on Drug Dependence Treatment and Care, UNODC and WHO will strengthen their collaboration on drug dependence treatment and care at the global, regional and country levels, sharing their networks of intervention and interacting with Member States and the other intergovernmental organisations on a common basis.

Nicolas Clark, Medical Officer, Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse, World Health Organisation, WHO

The aims of the Joint Programme are:

- to promote policies that strike the right balance between the reduction of drug supply and demand, and incorporate science-based drug prevention and dependence treatment
- Humane and accessible treatment and care for more people with drug dependence and drug-related diseases (particularly HIV/ AIDS) that will result in opportunities for rehabilitation and reintegration into society
- Essential services based on scientific evidence which provide a recovery-oriented continuum of care, matching the needs of dependent drug users in all social, motivational and clinical stages

Session I Rome Consensus Europe: A proposal for Red Cross-Red Crescent concrete action

Area I: Prevention

Mr Alejandro Vigil Morán, Spanish Red Cross Asturias, *"Education in the Street" Project*⁹

The Project "Education in the Street" is an Integral Prevention project developed by the Spanish Red Cross in the town of Avilés (Asturias).

The first education activities in the street started in 1999 with children and youth in the districts of La Carrion, Versalles, La Luz, El Pozon, Llaranes and the Poblado de Pescadores. Since the beginning, the project has aimed to engage with the children and the youth living in these districts and establish a pedagogical relationship with them.

Ms Barbara Nasadiova, Slovakia Red Cross *Alcohol, drugs and prevention programme*¹⁰

Ms Nasadiova provided participants with an overview of the current drugs situation in Slovakia: In Slovakia, latest data shows an increased number of young marihuana and ecstasy users and increased numbers of criminal acts among young drug users. The Slovakia Red Cross programmes aim to spread awareness among young people, to lead discussion about the main problems leading to drug addiction, and to offer different possibilities for leisure time activities within the Red Cross.

Area II: Treatment and rehabilitation

Mr Antonio Díaz-Rubín Suárez-Pazos, Spanish Red Cross Madrid

*Social Reintegration and Employment*¹¹

In Madrid, the Spanish Red Cross has opened five treatment centres for drug users and as well as a support centre and a daytime care structure. 1450 people have received assistance at these centres.

Mr Pablo Villarino Torrado, Spanish Red Cross Orense *Treatment and care in penitentiary centres*¹²

The role of the Red Cross in penitentiary centres is to develop activities that follow the organisation's fundamental principles. The programme aims to establish humane relationships with addicted inmates and to help them during the treatment and during the social reintegration phases. The Spanish Red Cross Orense branch has adopted a range of guidance, psychosocial support and harm reduction activities in

⁹ For more details of Mr Morán's presentation please visit, <http://www.romeconsensus.net/modules/europe/Events>

¹⁰ For more details of Ms Nasadiova's presentation please visit, <http://www.romeconsensus.net/modules/europe/Events>

¹¹ For more details of Mr Suarez-Pazos' presentation please visit, <http://www.romeconsensus.net/modules/europe/Events>

¹² For more details of Mr Villarino Torrado's presentation please visit, <http://www.romeconsensus.net/modules/europe/Events>

prisons. The activities in penitentiary centres are able to take place thanks to the participation of volunteers. For this reason, the training of volunteers represents one of the most important elements of the programme.

Session II

Area III: Harm Reduction

Mr Rafael Aranda Jiménez and **Juan Luis Pérez**, Spanish Red Cross Almeria

*A home for drug addicts*¹³

Mr Jimenez and Mr Perez presented the major activities developed by the Spanish Red Cross in the region of Almeria, focusing on the local Centre for Drug Addicts opened in 1988. A video produced by the volunteers working at the Centre was shown to the participants, presenting the activities of the Centre. Mr Perez also shared with the audience his personal experience of volunteering at the Almeria's centre.

Dr Elena Eftimovska, Macedonia Red Cross

*Harm Reduction Programme Presentation*¹⁴

Macedonia has a relatively well developed network of NGOs that provide harm reduction services (eleven harm reduction programs in the bigger cities, three of which are run by the Macedonian Red Cross). However, the major challenge is the unavailability of centres for substitution treatment, with only ten percent of the target population participating in the substitution programme. This reduces the total impact of the harm reduction programs.

The Red Cross has for some years been active in drug preventive educational activities, mainly with youth populations. This is not sufficient to address the drug problem in the country, especially regarding the needs of active drug users. For these reasons the Macedonian Red Cross runs a harm reduction programme alongside the drug prevention activities.

Specific objectives of the harm reduction programme of the Macedonian Red Cross are:

- To increase the availability of clean injecting equipment and condoms among injecting drug users;
- To establish contact with a greater number of injecting drug users and provide them with information about health protection, HIV, STI prevention and treatment opportunities;
- To increase to health care, social and legal services;
- To perform advocacy for public health approaches towards injecting drug users and to reduce the stigma and discrimination associated with drug use.

¹³ The presentation and the video of the activities of the Drug addicts centre in Almeria are available on the Rome Consensus website <http://www.romeconsensus.net/modules/europe/Events>

¹⁴ For more details over Dr Eftimovska's presentation <http://www.romeconsensus.net/modules/europe/Events>

Ms Milena Panatoyova, Bulgaria Red Cross
*Harm Reduction Programme Presentation*¹⁵

The Bulgarian Red Cross works in the field of drug addiction, aiming to reduce the health and social vulnerability of children and young adults, through a promotion of humanitarian values. Since 2004, the Bulgarian Red Cross runs harm reduction activities among IDUs in two Bulgarian cities- Russe and Kyustendil - within the framework of the Ministry of Health HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Programme (funded by the Global Fund). These activities aim to reach out to the most vulnerable drug users. In Kyustendil 75 % of the IDUs for example are from the Roma community. Between 2005 and 2006 the Bulgarian Red Cross implemented its harm reduction intervention in Stara Zagora, with the collaboration of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent and the Italian Red Cross.

Session III: Conclusions and Actions

Following these presentations a three-hour group discussion session enabled National Societies present to discuss ways in which they could use the information they had been given on the EU Drugs Strategy and Action Plans, and on the work of their colleagues, to enhance their own work.

Participants were also asked to consider how they could mainstream the principles of the EU Drugs Strategy and Action Plan in existing and prospective activities.

The session was also used to discuss ways to further develop a specific European approach to drug use within the network of the RC/RC National Societies within Europe.

The core request from participants to the *Rome Consensus Europe* coordination team was to develop ways in which National Societies could learn from the best practices laid out in the EU Drugs Strategy and Action Plans and by the programmes that reflected these aims already being implemented by European National Societies.

The session enabled participants to look to the future for ways to follow up and build on the proceedings of the Conference and to consolidate the information that had been presented over the previous two days, and to explore ways that the best practices within the EU and within the RC/RC network could be systematised for use within the National Societies in Europe.

¹⁵ For more details over Ms Panatoyova's presentation <http://www.romeconsensus.net/modules/europe/Events>