



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Drug addiction: The International Partnership on Substance Abuse concludes its first youth training in Kenya

Harm reduction in the Africa Region / **Kenya** / 19 May 2017

Introduction

The International Partnership on Substance Abuse (composed by Villa Maraini Foundation, the Italian Red Cross and IFRC), with support of UNDEF (UN Fund for Democracy), has organised a number of trainings on humanitarian drug policies targeted for youth volunteers. Whilst a meeting in Kenya has just concluded, next meetings are scheduled for late July in Kyrgyzstan RC, with the countries of Central Asia and Europe in conjunction with the Annual Meeting of ERNA (the European Network on AIDS/HIV), as well as a meeting in late November with the Tajikistan RC. The aim of this project is to strengthen the knowledge and active participation of young volunteers within the local communities to develop humanitarian policies that respond to the needs of drug addicts, in particular to support them to have access to health services.

Combatting drug addiction and fighting stigma

The latest training course in Kenya provided an opportunity to discuss the challenging issue of combatting drug addiction and fighting the stigma around this subject. The Secretary General of the Red Cross of Kenya and Vice President of the IFRC, Dr. Abbas Gullet, personally intervened to express their full support in the fight against drug addiction and stigma, thanking Villa Maraini and the Italian RC for the strategic support received in recent years to tackle the dramatic consequences of drugs on the coastal area of Kenya. The International Partnership has recently funded the construction of a rehabilitation center on the island of Lamu and they have provided training activities for volunteers, healthcare workers and medical doctors.

In addition, the SG, in agreement with the President of the Partnership, Massimo Barra, made a call to the young leaders to draft an official letter to address to the National Societies aimed to foster their commitment to combat drugs and create a humanitarian task-force for drugs issues within the Movement.

Massimo Barra expressed his appreciation for the welcome and attention shown by the Kenyan RC on this challenging issue: "it is impressive to notice the increasing political will of the Kenyan RC which has succeeded in developing so many activities in support of drug users in few years, gaining



a lot of know-how which will allow them to be self-sufficient in facing the health and social related issues on drug abuse".

In conclusion, all the youth volunteers drafted a final Declaration (see below) which will be delivered to their own National Societies' governance departments to ask for their support and commitment on this substantial humanitarian challenge.

DECLARATION ON YOUTH ENGAGEMENT FOR A NEW HUMANITARIAN DRUG POLICY

During the Regional Training Workshop on "Youth Engagement in the Field of Drug Abuse" held in Malindi, Kenya from 8th to 12th May 2017, we the youth volunteers of RC/RC from Kenya, South Africa, Seychelles NSs became aware of the importance of engaging ourselves in the drug abuse issue that all the countries in the world are facing.

We realized that there is a wide gap in how the worldwide phenomenon of drug abuse is interpreted and understood by the old and by the new generations and how people who have the power do not understand how deep is the problem and how the existing policies do not respond to the needs of the people using drugs. All the strategies aimed to criminalize the phenomenon have caused great damages through the so called "war on drugs" which has quickly become a "war on drug addicts" producing further damages, human suffering, and human rights violations.

Instead of war on drugs we unanimously support a humanitarian drug policy based on compassion and respect of the human rights.

Substance abuse is both a taboo and a reality in our communities, for that reason we want to contribute to tackling this humanitarian challenge throughout our youth leadership and commitment and raise a wider awareness on this issue within our NS and our governments.

It is evidence-based that substance abuse is not a choice, for this reason we want to contribute to be a resource in our NS and in our countries for providing peer support to those of our fellows who need to be brought to a safe place.

We want to elevate and update the key role of the RC/RC in protecting human dignity.

For this reason, we want to commit ourselves to:

- Build a Task Force on Drug Abuse within the NS to start training and campaign for volunteers
- Develop education Tool such as Blogs and Vlogs to raise awareness
- Involve community leaders (elders, chief of the villages, counsellors, national assembly) and religious leaders and keep a consistent relationship with them
- Organize Social and Health Campaign on Drug Abuse, Hep C, HIV/AIDS, Stigma targeting the community (distributing condoms, testing)
- Mapping existing Youth clubs and participate to local, national and international youth meetings
- Organize activities in schools involving both teachers and students (awareness raising on the issue, debate, peer education, counselling)

- Provide external education and informal education targeting out of school youth, street youth and youth living in slums through Mobile Youth Camps (MYC)

In order to carry out the above-mentioned activities through a holistic approach on this issue we ask to our NS to support us in:

- Facilitation of access and involvement in the health and social departments to conduct research and data collection
- Provision of cameras in order to shoot videos for the creation of a Vlog, hardware and software for editing, and internet for publishing the materials
- Provision of the necessary equipment for organizing trainings for the volunteers through the peer education methodology
- Provision of the necessary equipment in order to carry out MYC
- Increase attention and enhance discussion on this topic during the RC/RC Movement official meetings in order to revise and amend the Resolution on Drug Abuse that was last edited in 1986

In order to implement the above listed activities, we ask public authorities to:

1. Treat drug users as sick people and not criminals: they should be referred to rehabilitation centres instead of prison
2. Provide specific services for drug users inside prisons, such as opioid substitution treatment (methadone) and psycho-social support
3. Establish a referral system between prisons, health services and CSOs to ensure follow up and continuation of services for drug users after release from prison
4. Conduct research and surveys to collect data on the drug abuse situation in the community, collaborating with CSOs working in the field
5. Impose heavy fines on drug traffickers and use this money for treatment and rehabilitation services
6. Consider stigma, discrimination and violence against drug users as an offence
7. Encourage local production of methadone, in order to reduce costs, increase the number of clients and improve economy of the country
8. Decentralize services for drug users in order for them to have easy access to the facilities
9. Facilitate the social inclusion of drug users through the provision of vocational skills training, income generating activities and scholarships
10. Include harm reduction strategy in the national drug policies and allocate specific budget for these programmes
11. Ensure drug users equal access to criminal justice system like any other offender (no beaten up, no assault, no arbitrary arrest)
12. Include drug abuse topic in the training curricula for law enforcement officers
13. Include drug prevention in the school curricula, starting from primary school
14. Respect, protect and promote the health and human rights of drug users, adopting an humanitarian drug policy