

Young People 'Leading the HIV Prevention Revolution' Ask Adults to Now Make It Happen!

After the successful participation of over 300 young at the XVIII International AIDS Conference held in July 2010, UNAIDS now launches its Getting to Zero strategy. The document calls for zero new infections amongst people who use drugs, which while ambitious, seems impossible without the required associated services and the decriminalization of young drug users.

22 March, 2011, Vienna, Austria.- UNAIDS aims to ensure 'All new HIV infections are prevented among people who use drugs' by 2015 in their recently released *Getting to Zero* strategy. While the UNAIDS strategy vows to 'revolutionize' prevention, young people from all around the world are *leading* the prevention revolution and call on the international community to increase pressure and *Make It Happen!*

Zero infections will not be achieved if Member States, who are this week present at the 54th Session Commission on Narcotic Drugs of the United Nations, continue to deny the inclusion of 'harm reduction language' in their resolutions, and continue to criminalize people who use drugs, in particular young people.

"Criminalizing drug use fosters stigma, discrimination, isolation and hate. This, in turn, contributes to a vicious cycle where 'rehabilitation' is in many countries also compulsory, when it should be voluntary. It also leads to riskier behaviors, greatly increasing risks of HIV infection" said Aram Barra, Drug Policy Programme Director of Espolea, a youth-led, Mexican based organization working on human rights and empowering of young people in their own communities with a gender perspective at the press conference of the **Now Make It Happen!** campaign.

Mr. Barra then continued by stating: *"Young people from all around the world can lead a policy revolution, as it was showed by the UNAIDS through its OUTLOOK Report of 2010. Nevertheless, for this to happen, governments around the world need to hear the concerns and real needs of their newer generations and act in accordance to that"*. Youth led organizations present at the AIDS Conference last year and the CND this year agree young people want their heads of State and the international community to commit to their development and promote Human Rights, Harm Reduction and Health Resources to this end.

Young people are greatly affected by the global HIV and AIDS epidemic. 5.4 million people worldwide between the ages of 15 and 24 are living with HIV. Globally, about 45% of new infections are among young people (UNAIDS/WHO 2008). In Eastern Europe specifically, 70% of the new infections are among young drug users.

As the international community negotiates a new Declaration of Commitment on HIV and AIDS in the coming months, the needs of young people who use drugs must be given central consideration in the deliberations. Resolutions made at the Commission on Narcotic Drugs must also aim to ensure a supportive policy environment that allows for effective HIV prevention policy and practice.

Young people from around the world call for the protection of young people's human rights, and for increased attention to harm reduction approaches for young people who use drugs by:

- **Reforming drug policies** that criminalize young people for drug use and building alternative programs to incarceration;
- **Ending zero-tolerance / abstinence only drug education** and couple drug education with comprehensive sexual health education;
- Conducting **better research on young people and drug use** that includes young people's participation in leading data collection and policy analysis, and

- Clearly **defining harm reduction services for young people** and making sure they get access to them, such as substitution therapy drug treatment and needle exchange.

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