

**Press Coverage of the 48th Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND)
March 2005**

Note: The following press coverage deals with aspects of the CND (especially HIV/AIDS) that a coalition of groups, including Human Rights Watch, Open Society Institute, the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, and the International Harm Reduction Association, sought to highlight in the days leading up to the Commission. Other aspects of CND negotiations are not referenced here.

Press

2/26—New York Times	<i>Ideology and AIDS</i> (editorial)
2/27—Washington Post	<i>Deadly Ignorance</i> (editorial)
3/2—Guardian Unlimited	<i>UK attempt to eradicate Afghan opium fails</i>
3/5—International Herald Tribune	<i>U.S. ideologues put millions at risk</i> (op-ed by Aryeh Neier)
3/7—The Guardian	<i>'Just say no' is no answer</i>
3/7—RIA Novosti, Russia	<i>Un Commission discusses Afghanistan's drug production</i>
3/7— Mail & Guardian Online	<i>Afghanistan's coming up poppies</i>
3/9—Advocate.com	<i>U.S. and U.N. drug policy directors butt heads over needle exchanges</i>
3/10—Los Angeles Times	<i>Council OKs Help for Drug Users, Tenants</i>
3/10—The Badger Herald (Univ. of Wisconsin)	<i>Moralizing doesn't fight AIDS</i>
3/11—Washington Post	<i>Needle Exchange helps prevent HIV</i> (letter)
3/13—Sunday Herald, UK	<i>Drugs expert warns: cannabis as dangerous to society as heroin</i>
3/14—Toronto Star	<i>U.S. dogma hinders AIDS battle</i>
3/21— Light of Myanmar	<i>Drugs destroyed on 18 occasions between 1990-2004 valued at US 14452m</i>

Wires

3/2—Inter Press Service (IPS)	<i>"Just Say No" Called Deadly Advice by Drug Experts</i>
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3/7—Reuters *U.S. Defends Opposition to Addict Injection Rooms*
The 3/7 Reuters article also ran in:
Keralanext, India
ABC News
Yahoo News

3/7—AP (reprinted on Officer.com) *U.N. Group on Narcotic Drugs Begins Meeting in Vienna*

3/7—AP *Global drug policy must address spread of HIV because of drug injection, U.N. official says*

3/8—AFP (Tribune de Genève) *US under fire over needle exchanges for AIDS prevention*

The 3/8 AFP article also ran in:
Designerz.com, GA
Political Gateway, FL
Yahoo News

3/8—Designerz.com (AFP) *US, UN disagreement over needle exchange for AIDS prevention*

3/9—Fort Wayne Sentinel (KRT) *Clean needles save lives*

3/10—AP *AIDS Experts Want Drug Addicts to Have Better Access to Clean Needles*

The 3/10 AF article also ran in:
Canada.com News (3/12)

Other web-based coverage

3/2—Common Dreams *U.S. Gag on Needle Exchange Harms U.N. AIDS Efforts Before U.N. Narcotics Meeting, Groups in 56 Countries Assail U.S. Tactics*

3/3—Scoop.co.nz, New Zealand *US Silences UN on Needle Exchange*

3/4—Aidsmap *US Pressure for UN needle/syringe exchange u-turn 'overrules science', campaigners say in open letter prior to Vienna drugs meeting*

3/4—Kaiser Daily HIV/AIDS *Open Letter From Advocates Urges U.N.*

Report	<i>Commission on Narcotic Drugs Not To Withdraw From Needle-Exchange Programs</i>
The 3/4 Kaiser Daily HIV/AIDS Report article also ran in: Medical News Today	
3/8—Kaiser Daily HIV/AIDS Report	<i>U.S., U.N. Drug Policy Heads Disagree on Needle Exchange for HIV/AIDS Prevention</i>
The 3/8 Kaiser Daily HIV/AIDS Report article also ran in: Medical News Today (on 3/9)	
3/8—Drug Policy Alliance	<i>UN Commitment to HIV/AIDS Harm Reduction Hurt by U.S. Pressure</i>
3/8— Hellenic Resources Network	<i>United Nations Daily Highlights, 05-03-08</i>
3/16—Medical News Today, UK	<i>Bush Admin's 'Ideological' Approach to HIV/AIDS Prevention Impedes Efforts To Fight Disease, Opinion Piece Says</i>



Dow Jones & Reuters

The New York Times

Editorial Desk; SECTA

Ideology and AIDS

729 words

26 February 2005

The New York Times

Late Edition - Final

14

English

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The Bush administration has contributed to suffering and death through the so-called global gag rule, which prohibits Washington from giving money to any group that performs -- or even talks about -- abortions. Organizations that provide desperately needed family planning and women's health services have lost their financing. Now there are moves in Congress and inside the administration to apply a similar rule to needle-exchange programs. That would be an even more deadly mistake.

Allowing drug users to trade used needles for clean ones gets dangerous needles off the street and minimizes needle sharing. A proven weapon against AIDS transmission, it has not been shown to increase drug use, and may indeed reduce drug addiction by providing a way to talk to drug users and lead them to treatment. It is endorsed by virtually every mainstream public health group.

Getting users into drug treatment is the best way to keep them safe. But the push for treatment -- which is expensive and difficult -- should come with needle exchanges.

Drug use is not a significant source of AIDS infection in Africa. In parts of Asia, the former Soviet bloc and Eastern Europe, needles are the major source of infection; three-quarters of all newly infected people in Russia are intravenous drug abusers, as are half of those newly infected in China. These are just the places where the AIDS epidemic is likely to explode next. A bumper poppy crop in Afghanistan will worsen the outlook, producing cheap heroin that could turn opium smokers into heroin injectors and thus fuel the epidemic.

Opponents of needle exchanges, mainly among the religious right, argue that the practice muddles the message that illegal drug use is unacceptable, and keeps drug abusers from suffering the consequences of their addiction. By this twisted logic, doctors should refuse to treat lung cancer in smokers. In any case, AIDS infections from sharing needles are not limited to drug users. They infect sexual partners, spreading the epidemic through societies.

While Washington does not buy syringes for needle-exchange programs, it does give money to groups that use other people's money to administer needle exchanges. But some conservatives are attempting to stop even that. The assistant secretary of state for international narcotics and law enforcement, Robert Charles, warned the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, which currently holds the rotating chairmanship of the joint program UnAids, that the organization should not work on needle-exchange issues and should remove positive references to them from its Web site, which it did.

Representatives Mark Souder of Indiana and Tom Davis of Virginia, both Republicans, have asked the United States Agency for International Development for details on all financing for programs in which any group strongly advocating needle exchanges also participates. These lawmakers claim that a United Nations' drug agency report attacks needle exchanges as encouraging drug use. In fact, the report makes no such accusation and endorses needle exchanges.

In the Senate, a member of the staff of Sam Brownback, the Kansas Republican, has compiled a grossly inaccurate chart of programs financed by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria that is subtitled "Immoral, Illegal (with bilateral funds) or Inconsistent with U.S. Foreign Policy." Needle exchanges rank high. At the moment, Mr. Brownback's office says he does not intend to attempt to block these programs. But some newer right-wing lawmakers are considering it.

So far, attempts to eliminate needle-exchange programs overseas seem to have limited support. Many administration officials and conservatives in Congress do not want to see crucial AIDS prevention measures derailed or American support withdrawn from such organizations as the Global Fund. One important test will be what the administration does in early March at the annual

meeting of the United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs. Last year, United States representatives there attacked the scientific evidence in favor of needle exchanges as unconvincing. This year, the United States should refrain from such attacks -- and members of Congress should call off their budding witch hunt.

Washington's antipathy toward needle exchanges is a triumph of ideology over science, logic and compassion. The United States should help pay for these important programs. If it cannot bring itself to do so, it should at least allow the rest of the world to get on with saving millions of lives.

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washingtonpost.com

Deadly Ignorance

Sunday, February 27, 2005; Page B06

THE BUSH administration is quietly extending a policy that undermines the global battle against AIDS. It is being pushed in this direction by Congress, notably by Rep. Mark Edward Souder (R-Ind.). But some administration officials zealously defend this policy error, claiming scientific evidence that doesn't exist.

The administration's error is to oppose the distribution of uncontaminated needles to drug addicts. A large body of scientific evidence suggests that the free provision of clean needles curbs the spread of AIDS among drug users without increasing rates of addiction. Given that addicts are at the center of many of the AIDS epidemics in Eastern Europe and Asia, ignoring this science could cost millions of lives. In Russia, as of 2004, 80 percent of all HIV cases involved drug injectors, and many of these infections occurred because addicts share contaminated needles. In Malaysia, China, Vietnam and Ukraine, drug injectors also account for more than half of all HIV cases. Once a critical mass of drug users carries the virus, the epidemic spreads via unprotected sex to non-drug users.

The administration claims that the evidence for the effectiveness of needle exchange is shaky. An official who requested anonymity directed us to a number of researchers who have allegedly cast doubt on the pro-exchange consensus. One of them is Steffanie A. Strathdee of the University of California at San Diego; when we contacted her, she responded that her research "supports the expansion of needle exchange programs, not the opposite." Another researcher cited by the administration is Martin T. Schechter of the University of British Columbia; he wrote us that "Our research here in Vancouver has been repeatedly used to cast doubt on needle exchange programs. I believe this is a clear misinterpretation of the facts." Yet a third researcher cited by the administration is Julie Bruneau at the University of Montreal; she told us that "in the vast majority of cases needle exchange programs drive HIV incidence lower." We asked Dr. Bruneau whether she favored needle exchanges in countries such as Russia or Thailand. "Yes, sure," she responded.

The Bush administration attempted to bolster its case by providing us with three scientific articles. One, which has yet to be published in a peer-reviewed journal, was produced by an author unknown to leading experts in this field who is affiliated with a group called the Children's AIDS Fund. This group is more renowned for its ties to the Bush administration than for its public health rigor: As the Post's David Brown has reported, it recently received an administration grant despite the fact that an expert panel had deemed its application "not suitable for funding." The two other articles supplied by the administration had been published in the American Journal of Public Health. Although each raised questions about the certainty with which needle-exchange advocates state their case, neither opposed such programs.

Evidence that the administration does not cite leaves little doubt about the case for needle exchange. A

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study of 81 cities published in 1997 in the *Lancet*, a medical journal, found that in cities without needle-exchange programs, HIV infection rates among injection drug users rose by nearly 6 percent per year; by contrast, cities that had introduced free-needle programs witnessed a *decrease* in infection rates of about the same magnitude. Elias A. Zerhouni, the director of the National Institutes of Health, wrote last year that exchange programs "can be an effective component of a comprehensive community-based HIV prevention effort," and a World Health Organization technical paper agreed that the provision of clean needles and syringes should be "a fundamental component of any comprehensive and effective HIV-prevention programme." Addressing legitimate methodological questions about the research favoring needle exchange, the WHO reasonably concluded that incomplete scientific evidence does not confer the freedom to ignore the knowledge we do have.

Respecting science does not appear to be the administration's priority, however. Not only is it refusing to spend federal dollars on needle exchange, but the administration also is waging a campaign to persuade the United Nations to toe its misguided line. The U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime, which is heavily reliant on U.S. funding, has been made to expunge references to needle exchange from its literature, and the administration is expected to continue its pressure on the United Nations at a meeting that starts March 7. The State Department's new leadership needs to end this bullying flat-earthism. It won't help President Bush's current effort to relaunch his image among allies. And it's almost certain to kill people.

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UK attempt to eradicate Afghan opium fails

Alan Travis, home affairs editor
Wednesday March 2, 2005

Guardian

Afghanistan is on the verge of becoming a "narcotic state" with its biggest annual crop of opium since the overthrow of the Taliban, the United Nations drug control board warns today.

The International Narcotics Control Board reports that the opium crop in Afghanistan - which is the source of more than 90% of the heroin sold on Britain's streets - reached a bumper 4,200 tonnes, up 800 tonnes on the previous year.

The rise is a blow to Tony Blair who told the Labour party conference in 2000 that the war against the Taliban was an opportunity to eradicate the poppy harvest which is the source of three-quarters of all the world's heroin.

The INCB report says that Britain has the highest heroin seizure rate in Europe and the third highest number of heroin addicts.

The publication of the UN report also coincides with Home Office figures showing that the cocaine and crack culture is reaching record levels in England and Wales. The figures show the number of class A drug offences, including those involving heroin and cocaine, rose by 5% to 35,610 in 2003.

Hamid Ghodse, the INCB's president, said the British-led attempt to persuade Afghan farmers to grow other cash crops had failed. In 2003 farmers grew 3,600 tonnes of opium poppies in 17 out of the 28 districts of Afghanistan. Now it has spread to all 28 districts, with the area under cultivation increasing last year from 80,000 hectares (200,000 acres) to 130,000 hectares. The INCB said this compared with only 165 tonnes grown during the brutally enforced ban by the Taliban on opium production.

"The Afghanistan government needs to do something very serious, very quickly," said Professor Ghodse. "If it is not going to be a narcotics state, which is a risk, then Afghanistan needs to do very urgent action in eradication and alternative development."

Although opium prices fell considerably between 2003 and 2004 they remain above \$100 (£52) a kg - far higher than any other cash crop - and a crucial source of finance for the private armies of the drug warlords in Afghanistan.

The crop eradication programme is supported by a British-led international consortium, and tries to persuade farmers to grow alternative crops through negotiation. But it is now believed to be under pressure from the American administration which wants to adopt a forced crop eradication programme similar to that seen in Colombia in the last five years.

The UN report also warns of an alarming spread in HIV/Aids among injecting drug users in eastern Europe, Russia and central Europe with an estimated 4 million people now believed to be infected.

Britain's former deputy drug tsar Mike Trace said yesterday there would be an alarming US-led attempt next week at the UN's annual commission on narcotic drugs meeting in Vienna to rule out the use of needle exchange and other programmes to deal with the growing epidemic.

Needle exchange schemes have been used in Britain since the 1980s to ensure one of the lowest rates of HIV

infection among heroin injectors in Europe. Mr Trace, now a spokesman for the International Drug Policy Consortium, said governments that provided practical help, such as free access to clean syringes, could achieve significant reductions in the level of HIV infections.

But he said the US was consciously trying to tie aid to "moral lines in the sand" and would not endorse needle exchanges or heroin substitution programmes.

Britain and the rest of the EU are expected to criticise the move in Vienna next week but a vote to withdraw support from needle exchange programmes would send a damaging signal to the governments of the former Soviet Union.

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U.S. ideologues put millions at risk

By **Aryeh Neier** International Herald Tribune
Saturday, March 5, 2005

The AIDS epidemic

NEW YORK Global fanfare accompanies every International AIDS Conference, but an obscure United Nations meeting next week in Vienna may prove more critical to the course of the global HIV epidemic. Delegates are gathering for the 48th meeting of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, a largely unpublicized UN entity that sets the international drug control agenda and that this year is focusing on questions of HIV prevention. If recent events are any gauge, the commission - cowed by American hard-liners - will challenge the efficacy of programs, like needle exchange, proven to reduce HIV transmission among active drug users. With the world's fastest-growing epidemics now fueled by intravenous drug use, millions of people at risk for HIV, particularly in Asia and the former Soviet Union, will pay the price.

Shown in dozens of studies in America and elsewhere to reduce transmission without increasing drug use, needle exchange is perhaps the most effective of all strategies to prevent the spread of HIV. Yet in a pattern familiar from debates over sex education, Washington conservatives seem eager to hold up distortions of science as a model for the rest of the world. At last year's meeting of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, Europeans and Australians watched in amazement as American delegates declared the evidence for needle exchange "unconvincing."

U.S. representatives also blasted as a "counsel of despair" the harm-reduction approach, which recognizes that even drug users unable or unwilling to stop using drugs can be helped to avoid the AIDS virus and other problems. Backed by a coalition of prohibitionists that included Russia, Sweden and Japan, the United States ensured that the resolutions adopted by last year's commission were stripped of every mention of harm reduction. Any discussion of human rights of drug users was similarly excised.

This year the United States has not waited for a global gathering to force the UN to pledge allegiance to "zero tolerance." American officials have put significant back-channel pressure on the UN Office on Drugs and Crime - the current chair of the UN's joint program on HIV/AIDS - to retreat from needle exchange and other harm-reduction measures.

After a November meeting with Robert Charles, an assistant secretary of state in charge of the U.S. Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, the director of the Office on Drugs and Crime, Antonio Maria Costa, promised that he would review all of the office's printed and electronic statements to remove references to harm reduction. Costa also pledged that the office would be "even more vigilant in the future." As a start, a senior staffer directed subordinates to "ensure that references to harm reduction and needle/syringe exchange are avoided in UNODC documents, publications and statements."

More than semantic sanitation is at stake. In Russia, where estimated HIV cases now surpass those in all of North America and where 75 percent of new infections are attributable to intravenous drug use, officials have long pointed to the proceedings of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs to justify misgivings about needle exchange and refusal to treat addicts with noninjectable opiate substitutes like methadone.

Last year, Ukrainian officials returned from the commission to announce that they were shelving plans for a methadone pilot program.

In Thailand, government officials claimed that Costa had given his blessing to drug control efforts that included mass arrests, forced internments and more than 2,500 killings of suspected drug dealers. Costa strenuously denied the claim. But his office recently suspended a Bangkok-based program dedicated to reducing intravenous drug users' vulnerability to the AIDS virus in East Asia.

Completely dependent on donor contributions - the largest share from the United States - the Office on Drugs and Crime is caught between the rock of American intransigence on drug policy and the hard facts that show needle exchange and other harm-reduction strategies to be effective.

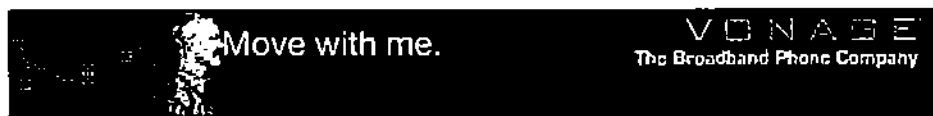
Having removed condom information from federal Web sites and insisting on abstinence-only sex education at home and abroad, the Bush administration is now poised to override the best available evidence in deciding how best to fight HIV related to drug use. What is needed at this year's Commission on Narcotic Drugs is unanimous commitment to deploying the tools, including needle exchange, known to reduce HIV among drug users, not the American policy of scuttling prevention methods proven to save lives.

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'Just say no' is no answer

American bully boy tactics over global drugs policies risk deepening the HIV crisis, warns Nick Cater

Nick Cater
Monday March 7, 2005

Guardian Unlimited

This week's UN drugs conference in Vienna looks set to illustrate how American prohibitionist policies utterly fail to grasp global realities, while deepening the worldwide HIV/AIDS crisis.

The big issue is harm reduction, whether measures such as needle exchanges, legal injection centres and substitution therapies help lessen the negative consequences of drugs for users and their communities, especially with regards to health.

As well as proving useful in developed countries from Switzerland to Australia, these are vital options for states of the former Soviet Union and central Asia, where unsafe injectable drug use is often the main if not the overwhelming factor in a big upsurge in HIV infections.

The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) recently appeared to be joining the consensus among most UN agencies, many governments and plenty of charities in both the drugs and HIV fields that a harm reduction approach is essential, even if police efforts continue against producers, smugglers and dealers.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies put it well: "Forcing people who use drugs further underground and into situations where transmission of HIV/AIDS is more likely, and denying them access to life-saving treatment and prevention services is creating a public health disaster.

"This happens even though the evidence from scientific and medical research on best practices and cost benefit analyses is overwhelmingly in favour of harm reduction programming ... The message is clear. It is time to be guided by the light of science, not by the darkness of ignorance and fear."

Despite the American experience of banning alcohol and thereby fostering organised crime, the US government's "just say no" drugs position matches its advocacy of sexual abstinence as its main response to HIV/AIDS. The policy reflects the irresponsible influence of the neocons and religious right in rejecting any flexibility over harm reduction strategies.

The US used crude muscle as UNODC's single largest paymaster to bully it back into line, suggesting that harm reduction strategies break the three global conventions on drugs and so are unacceptable for any state to adopt, even to fight an HIV/AIDS explosion.

American pressure extracted a humiliating letter from the UNODC executive director, Antonio Maria Costa, in which he agreed to "neither endorse needle exchange as a solution for drug abuse nor support public statements advocating such practices".

Yet, last July, Costa declared: "The HIV/AIDS epidemic among injecting drug users can be stopped - and even reversed - if drug users are provided, at an early stage and on a large scale, with comprehensive services such as outreach, provision of clean injecting equipment and a variety of treatment modalities, including substitution treatment.

"It is, however, a sad fact that less than 5%, and, in many high-risk areas, less than 1% of all drug users have access to prevention and care services. In too many countries, drug users are simply incarcerated. This is not a solution; in fact, it contributes to the rapid increase in the number of people living with HIV/AIDS."

Given that the "war on drugs" is already lost - illegal substances are available cheaply everywhere - and the war on terror cannot even halt heroin supplies from US-liberated Afghanistan, it is time to junk the UN conventions and look more sensibly at managing the world's enthusiasm for mood-altering substances.

In Vienna we need clear leadership from countries using or needing harm reduction strategies to show that the US, the biggest narcotics market and thus the greatest funder of the criminal and quite possibly the terrorist economy, is a dope when it comes to drugs.

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2005-03-07 18:10 * AUSTRIA * UN * NARCOTICS *
UN COMMISSION DISCUSSES AFGHANISTAN'S DRUG PRODUCTION

VIENNA, March 7 (RIA Novosti's Borislav Pechnikov) -The UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) held the first meeting of its session in Vienna on Monday.

A spokesperson for the UN Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention (UNODC) in Vienna told RIA Novosti that the main items on the session's agenda are "a dramatic growth in production of opium and heroin in Afghanistan as well as various issues and suggestions pertaining to reduction and ultimate extinction of opium poppy production in this country."

2004 saw a 64% increase in opium poppy production in Afghanistan as compared to the previous year, UNODC experts point out in their report published last Thursday by the UNODC headquarters in Vienna.

"With 131,000 hectares of opium poppy plantations cultivated in 2004, Afghanistan has set a double "record", featuring the world's largest area of opium plantations as well as the highest volume of narcotic drugs production in the country's history," UNODC executive director Antonio Maria Costa pointed out.

The United Nations calls on the Government of Afghanistan to undertake effective measures in order to halt cultivation of opium poppy and drugs production in the country, including efforts to eliminate poverty in rural areas, to conduct military operations and destroy drugs production laboratories, to support anti-corruption initiatives undertaken to cleanse the armed forces, police and local authorities; and to introduce tougher punishment for opium cultivation and drugs production.

According to UNODC executive director, "the world community will make a fatal mistake if it fails to alienate Afghanistan from drugs production after we have succeeded in alienating it from Taliban and Al Qaeda.

The CND Vienna session is to close on Friday.

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Afghanistan's coming up poppies

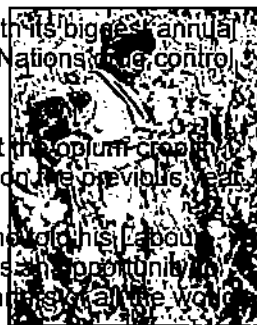
Alan Travis | London

07 March 2005 07:59

Afghanistan is on the verge of becoming a "narcotic state" with its biggest annual crop of opium since the overthrow of the Taliban, the United Nations drug control board warned last week.

The International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) reports that the opium crop in Afghanistan reached a bumper 4 200 tonnes, up 800 tonnes on the previous year.

The increase is a blow to British Prime Minister Tony Blair who told his Labour Party conference in 2000 that the war against the Taliban was an opportunity to eradicate the poppy harvest, which is the source of three-quarters of all the world's heroin.



Afghanistan's opium crop reached a bumper 4 200 tonnes. (Photograph: AP)

The INCB report says that Britain has the highest heroin seizure rate in Europe and the third-highest number of heroin addicts.

Hamid Ghodse, the INCB's president, said the British-led attempt to persuade Afghan farmers to grow other cash crops had failed. In 2003 farmers grew 3 600 tonnes of opium poppies in 17 of the 28 districts of Afghanistan. Now it has spread to all 28 districts, with the area under cultivation increasing last year from 80 000ha to 130 000ha.

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"The Afghanistan government needs to do something very serious, very quickly," said Ghodse. "If it is not going to be a narcotics state, which is a risk, then Afghanistan needs to do very urgent action in eradication and alternative development."

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Britain's former deputy drug tsar Mike Trace said on Tuesday that there would be an alarming US-led attempt next week at the UN's annual commission on narcotic drugs meeting in Vienna to rule out the use of needle exchange and other programmes to deal with the growing epidemic.

Needle exchange schemes have been used in Britain since the 1980s to ensure one of the lowest rates of HIV infection among heroin injectors in Europe. Trace, now a spokesperson for the International Drug Policy Consortium, said governments that provided practical help, such as free access to clean syringes, could achieve significant reductions in the level of HIV infections.

But he said the US was consciously trying to tie aid to "moral lines in the sand" and would not endorse needle exchanges or heroin substitution programmes.

Britain and the rest of the European Union are expected to criticise the move in Vienna next week but a vote to withdraw support from needle exchange programmes would send a damaging signal to the governments of the former Soviet Union. — © Guardian Newspapers 2005

Meanwhile, reports Sapa-AFP, the Afghanistan government responded to the report by saying it will step up the fight against drugs in coming months.

"The government of Afghanistan, with the help of the international community, is firmly pursuing the fight against narcotics on all fronts," the statement by President Hamid Karzai's office said.

Proposed measures included eradicating poppy fields, curtailing drug production, interdiction and punishing traffickers.

Wednesday, March 09, 2005



U.S. and U.N. drug policy directors butt heads over needle exchanges

At a conference in Vienna, Austria, Monday, drug policy directors from the White House and the United Nations sharply disagreed over using needle-exchange programs to reduce the risk of HIV infections among injection-drug users, with the U.S. official reiterating the Bush administration's opposition to the programs. John Walters, director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, said drug use itself is a risk factor for HIV infection and that efforts to curb injection-drug use worldwide will reduce new infections. "The single greatest way of preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS through drug users is taking those addicted and get them to recover," Walters said. The Bush administration opposes the implementation of needle-exchange programs at home and abroad, claiming there is no science to prove they are effective and stating that they encourage drug use.

But Walters's U.N. counterpart, Antonio Maria Costa, head of the agency's Office on Drugs and Crime, said needle-exchange programs are "appropriate as long as they are part of a comprehensive strategy to battle the overall drug problem." "We must not deny these addicts any genuine opportunities to remain HIV-negative," Costa said in a speech to an open session at the 48th session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. "We reject the false dichotomy that either drug control prevails with no consideration for HIV, or that HIV prevention prevails with no consideration for drug abuse."



<http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-syringe10mar10,1,1563721.story>

Council OKs Help for Drug Users, Tenants

Over-the-counter sales of syringes is approved, as is ordinance making it harder to evict people from rent-control apartments.

By Steve Hymon
Times Staff Writer

March 10, 2005

After a night of electioneering, a bleary-eyed Los Angeles City Council on Wednesday approved an ordinance that prevents landlords from evicting rent-control tenants after major renovations and another that allows adult drug users and others to buy syringes without a prescription.

One of Los Angeles' long-standing housing problems is that the city has a large number of apartments — particularly in poor neighborhoods — that are in very run-down condition. Many are rent-controlled.

In the past, city law allowed landlords to renovate units and then steeply raise the rent. Housing advocates complained that landlords were using renovations as a way to get rid of rent-control tenants, a big problem in a city with about 530,000 rent-controlled units.

Some landlords were using major repairs to harass tenants into leaving, said Brett Terrell, director of advocacy for the Inner City Law Center.

"We've had cases where landlords literally tore roofs off buildings during the rainy season," he said.

A moratorium stopped the combination of renovations and rent hikes three years ago. Under the ordinance passed by a 12-0 vote Wednesday, landlords who perform renovations can increase the rent a maximum of 10% to pay for it.

"This is something that will be implemented by landlords and felt by tenants, and if it fails, shame on us," said Councilman Eric Garcetti, who helped shepherd the ordinance through.

Landlords in the city have long complained that rent control spares them little money to make repairs. Nonetheless, many of them supported the ordinance as a means to recoup some costs.

"There are buildings out there that really need to be rehabbed, and it's in everyone's best interest to get it done," said Tara Bannister, executive director of the California Apartment Assn., which represents building owners in the city.

The ability to obtain syringes without a prescription has been long sought by health advocates who say it will help reduce the spread of HIV and hepatitis through the use of dirty needles by drug users.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger signed a bill last fall making syringe sales legal, but each city must also approve it before pharmacies can start selling them

The ordinance, which allows over-the-counter sales to those 18 and over, passed the council by a 12-0 vote but still must be signed by Mayor James K. Hahn. Pharmacies could choose whether to sell the syringes. Among the large chains, Walgreens has said it will do so.

The city currently pays about \$500,000 each year to support seven needle exchange programs in Los Angeles. The new measure is seen as another way to reach out to drug users who won't use the exchanges.

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The Badger Herald

OPINION & EDITORIAL

Moralizing doesn't fight AIDS

http://badgerherald.com/oped/2005/03/10/moralizing_doesnt_fi.php



by Rob Hunter

Thursday, March 10, 2005

This week marks the beginning of the United Nations' conference on drug policy, the United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs, in Vienna, Austria. One of the major issues being discussed is the drug-related spread of HIV/AIDS and strategies to combat it. The conference is taking place in a near-media blackout with minimal oversight from the participating delegations' home countries.

Nevertheless, the international community will be paying close attention to the outcome of the conference, where the major topic of discussion will be "harm reduction:" that is, programs such as needle exchange centers, substitute drug therapies and legal injection centers. Such measures will prove critical in curbing the spread of HIV in large portions of Asia, including the former Soviet Union and China, where intravenous drug use is the primary vector for infection. However, any progress made in implementing such programs will be accomplished despite the financial and diplomatic clout of the United States, rather than because of it.

The problem lies with the Bush administration's — and its Congressional allies' — commitment to ideological rigor over science. This antiscientific attitude is already evident in the federal government's approach to other foreign HIV/AIDS relief programs. Despite the fact that condom distribution programs are the most demonstrably effective (and cheapest) measures for curbing the spread of HIV through sexual contact, the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEFAR) mandates that 33 percent of all funds must be spent on programs advocating abstinence as a means of preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS; furthermore, faith-based programs are funded even if they make no mention of contraception to clients. Programs receiving U.S. funds are also required to vocally oppose the legalization of prostitution, even though the stigmatization of prostitution makes relief work and care an incredibly difficult ordeal.

That same penchant for moralizing and the demonization of victims and recipients of aid now appears to have taken hold in federal funding of drug-related HIV/AIDS relief. Last summer, Antonio Maria Costa, the director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), announced that: “the HIV/AIDS epidemic among injecting drug users can be stopped — and even reversed — if drug users are provided with ... outreach, provision of clean injecting equipment and ... substitution treatment.” A few months later, Assistant Secretary of State Robert Charles used American diplomatic muscle to force Costa to publish a letter affirming that UNODC would “neither endorse needle exchange as a solution for drug abuse nor support public statements advocating such practices.”

Why is the United States so opposed to harm reduction programs in fighting HIV/AIDS and so concerned with “relief” focusing on the behavior of aid recipients rather than their suffering and the medical treatment they require?

Apparently because, in the eyes of the administration and Congress, it is the behaviors themselves, not efforts to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS, that matter. In a recent move prominently decried on the op-ed pages of several national newspapers, Representatives Tom Davis, R-Va., and Mark Souder, R-Ind., have begun calling for the withdrawal of U.S. funds to relief agencies that operate or even promote needle exchange programs. Rep. Souder explained his motives in a recent press conference: “These lifestyles are the result of addiction, mental illness or other conditions that should and can be treated rather than accepted as normal, healthy behaviors.” In other words, it doesn’t matter how well methods such as needle exchanges actually work; U.S. aid should only be concerned with encouraging “normal” (read: “moral”) lifestyles abroad. That same twisted logic has rendered the domestic “War on Drugs” the farce it is today, and it is not a little disingenuous of Rep. Souder to argue that foreign drug abusers should be denied compassionate care, because we shouldn’t be encouraging their “abnormal” habits, when the United States is the largest market for illegal narcotics in the world.

Many Americans mistakenly believe that a dramatic portion of the federal budget is given over to foreign aid; in reality, less than one percent of GDP is spent on such projects. Paltry as that sum may be, it should not be held as a club over the heads of international relief agencies which could be making substantial gains in the fight against HIV/AIDS, were it not for the strings the United States is continually attaching to its purse. It is time for the federal government to abandon the self-congratulatory rhetoric of moralizing and to stop castigating aid recipients as immoral and promiscuous, and to start supporting those agencies that are engaged in meaningful care and prevention.

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Needle Exchange Helps Prevent HIV

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Friday, March 11, 2005; Page A22

The Bush administration's efforts to undermine needle exchange as part of a global HIV prevention strategy are appalling and deadly [editorial, Feb. 27]. Look no farther than the president's back yard for proof of how devastating they are.

Washington, which among the country's large cities has the highest annual per capita rate of new AIDS cases, is the only jurisdiction in the United States that is prohibited by Congress from using its locally raised taxes to fund a needle-exchange program, although needle exchange has been proved by almost every scientific standard to be effective at reducing HIV transmission without increasing drug use.

As a result, unlike those in other states and cities, our nonprofit group, Prevention Works, must raise every cent of its budget from private donors and foundations -- a task that not only is time-consuming and difficult but that distracts from life-saving work.

Prevention Works helps ensure that some 3,500 people a year are provided the tools and counseling to remain free of HIV and other blood-borne diseases, such as hepatitis C, and to combat their addiction.

Our experience tells us needle exchange works as part of a comprehensive HIV-prevention strategy. We applaud efforts to ensure that sound science prevails over partisan politics in the broader global fight against AIDS, and we encourage Congress and the president to understand the effect of their shortsightedness on lives in the nation's capital.

PATSY FLEMING

Vice President, Board of Directors

Prevention Works Inc.

Washington

The writer was director of national AIDS policy in the Clinton administration from 1993 to 1997.

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Sunday Herald - 13 March 2005

Drugs expert warns: cannabis as dangerous to society as heroin

By Aideen McLaughlin

A LEADING Scottish drugs researcher has claimed that cannabis could be as big a danger to society as cocaine and heroin.

In a comment piece written for the Sunday Herald, Professor Neil McKeganey, of the Centre for Drugs Misuse Research at the University of Glasgow, warns that the government and drugs workers should put the focus back on cannabis to solve the problem of illegal drug use in Scotland.

McKeganey argues that the threat of cannabis is not so much its health risk to the individual, but that it creates a climate in which the use of harder drugs could become increasingly socially acceptable.

He writes: "It is possible that the perception that it is OK to use illegal drugs if they are not seen to cause much harm to the vast majority of users, is a judgement which has been assisted by the perception of cannabis as a harm-free recreational drug.

"If this is the case then cannabis - at a societal level, if not at the level of the individual - is just as dangerous as heroin and cocaine." He calls this the "societal gateway" theory.

But McKeganey's comments drew angry reactions from Scotland's drugs workers. David Liddell, director of the Scottish Drugs Forum said: "Research has overwhelmingly shown that poverty and deprivation - not cannabis - is more likely to be the gateway into problematic drug use.

"People who develop serious drug problems do so by using any type of drug, irrespective of what it is. Cannabis per se is not the issue - people's personal and social difficulties are.

"The nut which society really needs to crack is the underlying issues which cause people to turn to drugs as an escape route in the first place."

Dr David Shewan of Caledonian University, co-author of a recent controversial report which showed that heroin use did not always lead to negative health or social problems, agreed.

He said: "There are health concerns in relation to the high strength of some cannabis available now, particularly when smoked by young users, and people with existing mental health problems.

"But I am not convinced that dealing with these health issues would be helped by what Professor McKeganey appears to be arguing for, a 'war on cannabis'.

"Making cannabis use primarily a criminal justice issue would undermine a more constructive focus on these health needs.

"It would distract attention from more intrusive issues of crime and underpinning problems of socioeconomic deprivation.

"If the concept of the societal gateway is accepted, then the drug that most obviously serves this function is alcohol."

Kenny MacAskill, justice spokesman for the SNP, agreed that alcohol had to be considered when addressing drug use.

"There is no easy answer to the drug problems in our society, and that includes alcohol," he said. "I am not for greater liberalisation, but I am certain that greater repression is not working either.

"We need to find a solution though, because repression and retribution on their own have not worked and will not work. It requires education, a cultural change and, to some extent, people to believe in themselves and have some hope rather than a nihilistic, escapist perspective."

Alistair Ramsey, director of Scotland Against Drugs, said while he doesn't wholly agree with McKeganey's theories, the debate into cannabis, which he believes has been stuck for 20 or 30 years, needs to be refreshed.

"This is an interesting proposition, but we can't ignore the fact that cannabis can and does cause for some people significant health problems, both mental and physical," he said.

It is estimated that 3.5 million people in the UK use cannabis. In January 2004, the Scottish Executive reclassified the drug from Class B to Class C status. But a spokesman for the Executive said that reclassification is not the same as legalisation.

He explained: "It simply recognises that while all drugs are harmful, some drugs are more harmful than others. Cannabis carries risks but it is not as dangerous as, say, heroin and cocaine. But dabbling in it could well leave you with a criminal record, as well as damaging your health.

"The Executive does not condone the use of cannabis. It is illegal and carries serious risk to both physical health and mental health. We also know that sustained use can create dependence - around 10% of people reporting to drug services say that cannabis is their main problem drug."

Earlier last week, countries including France, Germany, the Netherlands, Canada, Australia and Iran rallied at the annual meeting of the United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs to persuade the UN to reject a zero-tolerance approach in international drug policy.

Their appeal was vetoed by the US. The UK delegation stayed silent on the issue.

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Mar. 14, 2005. 01:00 AM

U.S. dogma hinders AIDS battle

CAROL GOAR

No fair-minded person could accuse the United States of being stingy in the global fight against AIDS. It has contributed more than any other country to the United Nations HIV/AIDS program. President George Bush has pledged an additional \$15 billion (U.S.) in AIDS relief by 2008 and delivered \$2.4 billion so far.

But America's money comes with ideological strings attached.

The Bush administration believes that sexual abstinence is the best way to prevent AIDS. It discourages — sometimes actively thwarts — condom distribution efforts. It withholds funds from groups that advocate birth control, provide contraceptives or promote safe sex.

It believes that anti-retroviral medicines produced by pharmaceutical giants in the U.S. and Europe should be used to treat HIV/AIDS. It resists — sometime blocks — the substitution of cheaper generic alternatives manufactured in India or Brazil.

It believes that prohibiting the use of illegal drugs is crucial to slowing the advance of AIDS. It will have nothing to do with needle exchange programs, methadone maintenance therapy or other harm reduction measures. Nor will it support international agencies that finance such schemes.

All this creates headaches for America's global partners. The world is now getting a glimpse of their predicament.

For the past seven days, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, one of the principal agencies in the fight against AIDS, has been holding an international policy session in Vienna.

Most nations, including Canada, are represented. Activists from dozens of human rights groups, AIDS organizations and international development agencies have also converged on the Austrian capital to voice their opposition to the U.S. approach.

The meeting ends today. Its outcome will show how far America's allies are prepared to go to accommodate its doctrinaire approach.

To Richard Elliott, policy and research director of the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, it is inconceivable that the U.N. body responsible for setting global drug policy would turn its back on millions of addicts who catch and spread the lethal virus through the use of contaminated syringes.

Approximately 5 million of last year's new HIV infections — an estimated 10 per cent — stemmed from injection drug use. In Russia, for example, HIV is exploding through the drug-using population. Up to 75 per cent of new infections are caused by the sharing of dirty needles.

"It would just be theatre of the absurd if the global community withdrew its support from proven harm reduction methods," Elliott said.

But such a retreat has already begun. Until last fall, the director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Antonio Maria Costa of Italy, supported safe injection sites and needle exchange programs as acceptable methods of preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS. But after a November meeting with Robert Charles, U.S. assistant secretary of state for international narcotics and law enforcement, his position changed.

Costa sent a letter — which was leaked to the media — promising to expunge all references to harm reduction and needle exchanges from the agency's documents. "We neither endorse needle exchange as a solution for drug abuse nor support public statements advocating such practices," he assured Charles.

Regional offices promptly began revising their publications.

That set the stage for the Vienna meeting. For the past week, AIDS activists from North America, Europe, Asia and Africa have been urging delegates not to be bullied into endorsing the U.S. position. "Silencing the U.N. on needle exchange is deadly diplomacy," said Jonathan Cohen of Human Rights Watch.

As the session draws to a close, it looks as if delegates will avoid taking an explicit stand on harm reduction programs and settle for a bland consensus that would allow the U.S. to keep flexing its financial and political muscles behind the scenes.

Such a result would impede — but not halt — the battle against HIV/AIDS. Health-care workers, community activists and development agencies would find ways to work around America's war on drugs, just as they've coped with its opposition to sex education and birth control.

No one disputes Bush's contention that AIDS would spread less quickly if no one had sex before marriage, no one was promiscuous, no one was raped or forced into prostitution and no one used injection drugs.

But in a world of pain and poverty, that's not going to happen. For all its resources and good intentions, America is a tragically blinkered general in a fight the world can't afford to lose.

Carol Goar's column appears Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

Additional articles by Carol Goar

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NEW **Monday, March 21, 2005** NEW

Headlines

**Drugs destroyed on 18 occasions between 1990-2004 valued at US 14452m
Fifth destruction of seized narcotic drugs, precursors,
chemicals and paraphernalia held in Lashio**



YANGON, 20 March — The fifth destruction of seized narcotic drugs, precursors, chemicals and paraphernalia of Shan State (North) organized by Shan State (North) Committee for Drug Abuse Control was held at the people's sports grounds in Lashio yesterday morning, attended by Prime Minister Lt-Gen Soe Win.

Also present on the occasion were Member of the State Peace and Development Council Lt-Gen Aung Htwe, Chairman of Shan State (North) Peace and Development Council Commander of North-East Command Maj-Gen Myint Hlaing, the ministers, the deputy ministers, ambassadors of the Philippines, Brunei Darussalam, the Russian Federation, Lao PDR, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Thailand, Japan and Singapore, consuls of the People's Republic of China and Japan, the liaison officer of Australian Police Force, officials of US Drug Agency, WHO and UNODC, officials of the State Peace and Development Council Office, departmental heads, the Secretary of CCDAC Director-General of Myanmar Police Force, local authorities, members of Shan State (North) CDAC, local national race leaders, members of USDA, local people and guests.

Daw Nan San Twam Kham of Lashio Township USDA, Professor Daw Myint Myint Than of Lashio Degree College and Sub-Police Inspector Sein Ma Ma of MPF acted as masters of ceremonies.

First, Prime Minister Lt-Gen Soe Win delivered an address, saying that in today's world, the problems of narcotics are not confined to a sole country or a people but are the concern of all nations of the world all of humankind.

While some countries face a problem caused by the cultivation of narcotic crops, some other countries are encountering the problems of psychotropic drugs produced from chemicals. Although some countries neither grow narcotic crops nor produce chemical narcotic drugs, they face problems of use or of being transit countries. The problems of drugs abuse is serious social



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problem being faced by almost all countries.



Myanmar is also amongst the countries that are having to meet the challenges posed by the drugs problems. The main problem faced by Myanmar is the illegal cultivation of the opium poppy, production of Opium and Heroin and its trafficking and use. At a time when problems of producing methamphetamine has been started since 1996, however the production of Opium and Heroin had fallen remarkably. Issues related to the production while nations of the world are combating the drug menace through international legislation on the one hand, on the other hand they have ratified and are cooperating in controlling the drugs menace on the basis of the UN single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961, the 1972 Protocol Amending the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, the United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, 1988. The International Narcotic Control Board and the Commission on Narcotic Drugs under the United Nations Economic and Social Council are also encouraging the international community to enhance cooperation. Myanmar on its part has ratified all drugs related Conventions and in accordance with these conventions has promulgated the Law and rules related to Narcotic and Dangerous Drugs, the Law and Rules related to the Control of Money Laundering. The Law and Rules on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters and is taking action in accordance with law. At the same time, it controls 25 chemicals used in the production of narcotic and psychotropic drugs. Myanmar has issued rules related to the supervision of controlled chemicals and it is actively engaged in eradication efforts.

In addition, Myanmar firmly believes that not only does the narcotic menace adversely affect national dignity and high social standards of the state, but it threatens our citizens and all humankind.

Since the time of the Myanmar kings, the successive governments of Myanmar have seriously undertaken the tasks of combating narcotic abuse. During the time of the State Peace and Development Council, as a result of gaining mutual understanding and mutual fate among the national brethren, peace, stability and the rule of law have gradually extended up to the border regions and as a consequence many good opportunities were presented for serious fulfilling the developing needs of the border areas and national races. As a result from striving only to combat the narcotic menace we have now been able to seriously work for the alleviation of the foods, shelter and clothing of the local people through crops substitutions, animal husbandry and other regional development activities. In order to give momentum to these endeavours the Ministry for Progress of Border Areas and National Races and Development Affairs was established. By so doing, it is certain that the bad historical legacy of the drug problem can be eliminated effectively in the long term. This is the reason also why the Government led by Head of State Senior General Than Shwe has laid down strategies, tactics and measures for the elimination of the narcotic problem.



Strategies include the destruction of the elimination of the drug menace as a national cause and to combat the menace from all angles, and to raise the living standards of the border areas and national races, thereby completely eradicating opium cultivation.

These strategies are being implemented through symmetrical actions of the tactics of eradication, reduction of consumption, and interdiction.

In order to concretely carry out activities in conformity with the strategies and tactics, a plan of action comprising a 15-year plan sub-divided into three medium-term plans of five years each, beginning from 1999-2000 to 2013-2014, was established. We have completed the first 5-year plan and are implementing the second 5-year plan. It has been assessed that the objectives set for the designated plan period have been successfully realized.

To get an accurate picture of the illegal cultivation of opium poppy in Myanmar, Myanmar and the United States have cooperated in opium yield surveys for ten times beginning from 1993 up to 2004. The 2005 international report of the US Government on strategies of controlling narcotics states that opium in 2004 is less than 34 percent of 2004 and that production of opium in 2004 decreased 40 per cent compared to that of 2003, the production has dropped 89 per cent compared to opium production 8 years ago. Likewise, Myanmar and UNODC have cooperated since 2002 in annual field surveys and the result have shown a consistent reduction. According to the UNODC report, the acreage of opium cultivation in 2004 has dropped 29 per cent compared to 2003 and opium production has dropped 54 per cent.

The significant reduction of opium cultivation and production in Myanmar is attributable not only to elimination measures but also to widespread pragmatic activities such as opium substitution, vocational livelihood promotion, regional development activities which are all essential for the elimination of opium production. Of particular importance to the success is the fact that the leadership of the state regional authorities, leaders of national races and the national races of the regions, and social organizations have worked in close harmony and dynamic cooperation.

Under the programme of the government's special project for development of the border areas, the government has spent to date over 60 billion kyats for projects of the development of remote border areas. Of this amount almost 80 per cent was utilized for activities associated with the eradication of opium cultivation such as opium crop substitution, animal husbandry and regional development. This is the reason why the situation in the border areas have significantly changed for the better when compared to the situation in the areas in the past. As the activities for the eradication of narcotic drugs gain intensity due to concerted efforts, Mongla region in Shan State (East) was able to declare itself as opium free zone in April 1997 and the Kokang region completely halted the cultivation of opium beginning 2003. Likewise, areas of other national races are energetically striving to have their respective areas and regions declared as opium free zones or opium free areas. Although the efforts exerted mainly using one's own resources and one's own strength is a good foundation for the long term, it must be noted that the national races who had to live in poverty throughout the ages have had to strive with great difficulty to achieve results. If the international community were to show understanding and render appropriate assistance, Myanmar's efforts to eliminate narcotics would meet with success much sooner.



In any case, bearing in mind resolution of the 20th Special Session of the 1998 United Nations General Assembly designating the year 2008 as the year for total eradication of narcotic drugs throughout the world, and ASEAN's objective of ASEAN Drugs Free Area by the year 2015, Myanmar has set the target of a Drug Free Myanmar by the year 2014 and is striving towards that end with its own plans and programmes.

Even as Myanmar had successfully reduced the cultivation and production of opium, the previously unheard menace of psychotropic tablets emerged in the country in 1996. It is well known that just as the chemical ephedrine used in the production of stimulant tablets cannot be produced in Myanmar, the country does not have ability to produce other chemicals that are used in processing of heroin and stimulant tablets. However, Myanmar is having to face criticism and accusations while drug traffickers transit Myanmar borders through neighbouring countries, producing and distributing heroin and stimulants to the international markets.

As narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances cannot be produced without chemicals, Myanmar is seeking to control these chemicals in cooperation with the neighbouring countries of India, China, Laos and Thailand. In February 2003, trilateral meeting of Myanmar, India and China for the control of chemical substances was held in Yangon. The meeting reached an agreement to enhance cooperation in suppressing the smuggling of illegal chemicals in the border areas. In addition, as there is a need for closer cooperation with neighbouring countries in the control of chemical substances, a five-nation ministerial meeting to control the substances was held in Chiang Rai in July 2003. China, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and India participated in the meeting. As a result of agreements reached at the meeting, closer cooperation ensured among the neighbouring countries with the result that in 2004 the illegal transportation of chemical substances was reduced.

Under the border areas drug control plan of Myanmar, China and UNODC border meetings were held and border liaison offices were opened. Information is being exchanged between the two countries. As a result of the cooperation programmes 36 fugitives wanted by the Chinese side were handed over for 14 times by the Myanmar authorities. Furthermore, under the Myanmar-Thailand drugs control programmes, border liaison offices were opened in Tachilek, Myawady and Kawthoung. Information exchanges between the two countries have also being held. Also under the cooperation programme, Myanmar has transferred fugitives wanted by Thailand, on three occasions. These efforts and activities of Myanmar have been reflected in 2005 International Drugs Control Study Report of the US.

At the same time, Myanmar has been making the necessary efforts for the elimination of narcotic drugs abuse. Two rehabilitation centres had been opened in Shwe Pyi Tha in Pyay and Shwe Pyi Aye in Phekhon in Shan State. Another rehabilitation centre, Shwe Pyi Thit is being constructed near Teema Village in Muse Township, Northern Shan State. Under the UNODC/Australia programme (AusAID) a pilot project for the prevention of HIV and other diseases has been implemented with assistance of NGOs from Myanmar and abroad.

Starting from 1990 up to 2004 narcotic drugs had been destroyed on 18 occasions. The total value of drugs destroyed is estimated at US\$ 14,452 million. The destruction of narcotic drugs and chemical have taken place also in Lashio on 33 different occasions since 1999. Also in the Wa region in the Northern Shan State, the Wa nationals have destroyed poppy fields and drugs under own arrangements on 6th March 2005, prior to this ceremony.

In addition, the new destiny project started in 2002 as a way to support the 15-year plan, opium poppy seeds and dried opium fruits were handed by cultivators to the relevant authorities. The total weight of these in 2003 and 2004 was over 1.6 million kilograms. These were burnt and destroyed on 11 occasions in various states and divisions. This is a very effective action as the destroyed poppy seeds, were they to have been cultivated would have resulted in over 440 tons of opium.

Therefore, to put the effort of Myanmar in a nutshell, Myanmar is exerting efforts to eliminate the menace of narcotic drug through the strategies of supply reduction, demand reduction and interdiction. In addition, on the 51st anniversary of the Armed Forces Day on 27 March 1996, the Head of State said in his speech "the battle against narcotics concerns all humankind and it is therefore wide-ranging and difficult endeavour. We will welcome any assistance that is offered in sincerity.

However, even if assistance is not forthcoming, we will continue our struggle with all our abilities as it is a manner which threatens humankind". The Head of State therefore stated Myanmar's unwavering determination in the battle against narcotic drugs. In conclusion, I would like to say that Myanmar has fine traditions in implementing and carrying out its national interest and in carrying out dutifully and unstintingly the national interest and the interest of humankind. In addition, either with the assistance or without the assistance from outside, and no matter whatever the criticism and opposition, Myanmar has fine traditions of unwaveringly striving to successfully fulfill its objectives. As a result of the fine traditions, success has been achieved in the efforts against the drug menace. In the future also the State, the people and the Tatmadaw will join hands together and strive further to achieve successes. I would also like to record my appreciation to all those persons who helped in making this ceremony the destruction of seized narcotic drugs, precursor chemicals and paraphernalia a success. I would also like to say that in seeking to resolve the drugs problems which threaten humankind, just as it is important to uncover the real causes it is equally important that all nations of the world and all people actively cooperate in the endeavour with clear and noble state of mind.

Next, Chairman of Shan State (North) Committee for Drug Abuse Control Chairman of Shan State (North) Peace and Development Council Commander of North-East Command Maj-Gen Myint Hlaing said that as this ceremony is burning the narcotic drugs which endanger all human being and we have again shown practically that we have been carrying out the tasks of drugs eradication as a national duty not only for our Northern Shan State but also for Myanmar Naing-ngan. Ceremonies like this have already been held in Northern Shan State thrice in 2002, once in 2003 and the total number is 5 times including this one.



To implement the task of drugs eradication with the guidance of the Head of State with a 15-year project for drugs eradication, with new destiny project of CCDAC and cooperation of local authorities, national brethren and regional people it can be carried out towards total eradication of poppy cultivation effectively.

In Northern Shan State, total eradication of poppy cultivation can be achieved at the western part of the Thanlwin river because of the strenuous efforts for eradication of poppy cultivation. We guarantee that in the eastern part of the Thanlwin river including the Kokang region, poppy cultivation is totally eradicated there. However, some few regions remain in remote areas in the eastern part of Thanlwin river and we will carry out the task of total eradication of poppy cultivation with added momentum. "Wa" leaders at the eastern part of Thanlwin river have promised to eradicate poppy cultivation during 2005. At the same time I here by promised firmly to carry out the

anti-narcotic drugs actively till achieving a drug free State with added momentum.

Afterwards, Director-General Brig-Gen Khin Yi of MPF reported that this is the fifth occasion that we have burnt and destroyed narcotic drugs here in Lashio, Northern Shan States since 2002. Additionally there have been 33 occasions where narcotic drugs, chemical, precursors and poppy seeds that were seized from border areas and other towns were burnt and destroyed and another 18 occasions in Yangon. A total of US\$14,452 worth of narcotic drugs were destroyed during those 18 occasions.

One of the most important elements, of this project is to advocate for surrendering poppy seeds to be destroyed. Though, poppy seeds do not contain morphine and were thus exempted from international control, the fact that these seeds themselves can be grown into plants led to advocate for surrendering them to be destroyed. In Northern Shan State, the destruction of 135,603 kilograms of poppy seeds surrendered by farmers prevented poppy cultivation in 83,039 acres which in turn prevented production of 36 tons of heroin.

To recap the efforts made in preventing poppy cultivation, I would like to emphasize out of the total 7,610 cultivated acres destroyed, 1,090 acres were in Northern Shan State during the year 2003-2004. Similarly, out of the 9,082 acres of poppy cultivated areas, 2,968 acres were destroyed in Northern Shan States during 2004-2005. In comparison, an additional 1,472 acres were destroyed between the period 2003-2004 and 2004-2005. In conclusion, I would like to bring to your attention though we have not received any international assistance or aid in this endeavours, senior Government officials have laid down directives, tactics and strategies to eradicate narcotic drugs utilizing our own resources.

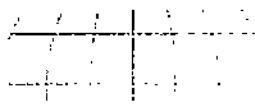
Vice-Chairman of Shan State (North) CDAC Commander of Shan State (North) Police Force Police Col Win Naing briefed them on drug elimination, cultivation of opium-substitute crops, rehabilitation of drug addicts and kinds and numbers of drugs to be destroyed today.

National race leader of Tamoenye region U Myint Lwin, Kachin national race leader U Zaw Yun of Shan State (North) Special Region-5 and Palaung national race leader U Aik Mone of Special Region-7 reported on totally free of opium cultivation in their respective regions. Afterwards, the Prime Minister and party tested the seized narcotic drugs, chemical precursors, poppy seeds and paraphernalia. They then viewed the documentary photos on drug eradication drive. Next, the Prime Minister and party, diplomats and local national race leaders pressed buttons to incinerate the seized narcotic drugs, chemical precursors, poppy seeds and paraphernalia. The Prime Minister cordially those present at the ceremony.

At the ceremony, 339.75 pyis of poppy seeds, 334.53 kilos of heroin, 225.50 kilos of opium, 57 kilos of morphine, 6.98 kilos of opium oil solid, 4.19 litres of opium oil, 646.35 kilos of stimulant tablets, 137 kilos of ephedrine, 12,282.04 litres of chemical liquid, 7,163.30 kilos of chemical powder and paraphernalia, totalling 78 items worth about K 4,000 million were destroyed.

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SERVICE NEWS AGENCY

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Ulysses de la Torre

More than 300 groups and individuals from 56 countries released an open letter Tuesday urging delegates of the U.N. Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) to resist U.S. pressure to withdraw support for syringe exchange programmes.

UNITED NATIONS, Mar 2 (IPS) - The letter, signed by scientists, policy analysts, human rights groups and AIDS activists, comes in anticipation of a CND session to take place in Vienna next week.

"Strategies that attempt solely to achieve abstinence from drug use do not constitute an acceptable alternative to programmes, such as syringe exchange, that help active drug users protect themselves from HIV/AIDS," according to the letter.

Of particular concern is a meeting reported to have taken place last November between Robert Charles, chief of the U.S. State Department's Bureau for International and Law Enforcement Affairs, and Antonio Maria Costa, the head of the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), a co-sponsor of the joint U.N. programme on HIV/AIDS.

Costa apparently emerged from the meeting with new ideas about omitting certain language from UNODC documents that specifically referred to syringe exchange programmes.

"Every independent body to study needle exchange -- including bodies that are part of or funded by the U.S. government -- has concluded that needle exchange reduces rates of HIV among drug users without increasing drug use," said Jonathan Cohen, a researcher with the HIV/AIDS and human rights programme at Human Rights Watch.

Officials from the UNODC and the Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs were not available for comment.

But a number of news outlets in the past week, including the Wall Street Journal and the Washington Post, have chronicled growing opposition among both the George W. Bush administration as well as Republican lawmakers to continue funding organisations that encourage clean needle programmes for injection drug users.

Sen. Sam Brownback, a Kansas Republican, told the Wall Street Journal in a Feb. 28 article that although "there is a conservative support" for AIDS programmes, other areas of concern "risk the continued support from a number of conservative members and conservative groups."

One of these areas of concern is the concept of "harm reduction," a strategy that acknowledges that some people will engage in high-risk behaviors such as commercial sex work and injection drug use and attempts to make those actions less dangerous.

Harm reduction was also among the language that the UNODC saw fit to remove from its documents after the November meeting with the Bureau for International and Law Enforcement Affairs.

A 1997 study of 81 cities in the British medical journal, the *Lancet*, found that HIV infection rates among intravenous drug users rose by nearly six percent a year in cities without needle exchange programmes, while infection rates decreased by nearly the same magnitude in cities with needle exchange programmes.

"In total, seven government-funded reports between 1991 and 1997 found that syringe exchange reduced HIV transmission without increasing drug use," according to a September 2003 report from Human Rights Watch on HIV prevention for injection drug users.

"As of a 2001 review of syringe exchange research, no established medical, scientific or legal body to study the issue had concluded otherwise."

The report also found that while injection drug use accounts for just 36 percent of AIDS cases in the United States, it is estimated to have caused 80 percent of infections in Russia, whose infection rates have surpassed North America's.

It also has caused the majority of HIV cases in China, Iran, Afghanistan, Nepal, the Baltic States and all of Central Asia, as well as much of Southeast Asia and South America.

"The fastest growing epidemics in the world are being driven by injection-drug use, and provision of sterile injection equipment is among the most important, proven strategies to contain them," said Kasia Malinowska-Sempruch of the Open Society Institute, another of the letter's signatories.

"It is reprehensible that the United States would try to compel the United Nations to keep silent about one of the best studied and most effective HIV prevention measures."

Pres. Bush asked Congress for 3.2 billion dollars to fund international HIV programmes in fiscal 2006. While most of the money is allocated to the U.S. Agency for International Development and the Dept. of Health and Human Services, it is unclear how much has been earmarked for the UNODC.

Meanwhile, Washington is also requiring that U.S. HIV/AIDS organisations seeking funding to provide services in other countries make a pledge opposing commercial sex work.

Under the new policy, even groups whose HIV/AIDS work in other countries has "nothing to do" with commercial sex workers must submit a written pledge opposing commercial sex work or risk losing federal funding, according to the *Wall Street Journal*.

The directive stems from two laws on HIV/AIDS funding and sex trafficking passed in 2003, and a measure included as an amendment to the 15-billion-dollar President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, which bars funding for any group that does not have a policy "explicitly opposing prostitution and sex trafficking".


Although Justice Department lawyers initially took the position that the requirement should be applied only to overseas groups because of constitutional free speech concerns relating to domestic organisations, the *Journal* reports that the agency reversed itself last year and said that the administration could apply the rule to U.S. groups. (END/2005)

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U.S. Defends Opposition to Addict Injection Rooms

Mon Mar 7, 2005 03:24 PM ET

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By Louis Charbonneau

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The so-called harm reduction programs are aimed at stopping the spread of HIV/AIDS and other blood-borne infections by ensuring that intravenous drug addicts have sterile equipment for the injection of

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But critics say they amount to condoning illegal drug use.

John P. Walters, director of United States National Drug Control Policy, said in a speech at this year's annual session based U.N. Office on Drugs and Crimes that the majority of the international community opposed injection rooms and "appeasement" programs.

He rejected the idea that opposition to such programs is "somehow an impediment to efforts addressing another glob spread of HIV/AIDS and other blood-borne pathogens such as Hepatitis C.

"This charge is wrong. The conventions (opposing such programs) are a bulwark against the public health tragedy of diseases and the public health tragedy of drug use and addiction," Walters said.

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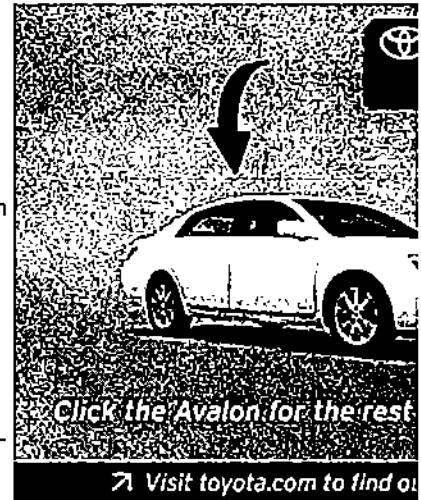
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Health: U.S. Defends Opposition to Addict Injection Rooms

24 Hours,45 minutes Ago

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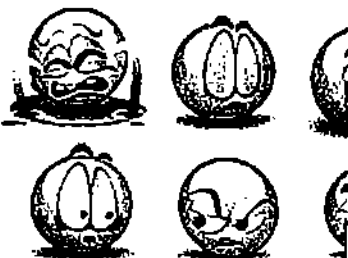
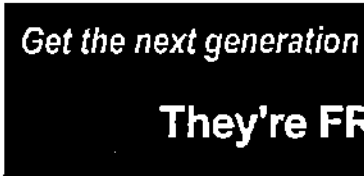
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U.S. Defends Opposition to Addict Injection Rooms

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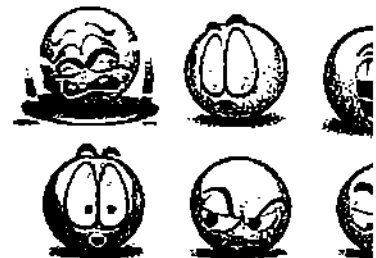
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U.S. Defends Opposition to Addict Injection Rooms

Reuters

Mar. 7, 2005 - American opposition to injection rooms and needle exchange for intravenous drug users is not undermining the fight against HIV/AIDS and other diseases that can be spread by dirty needles, a U.S. official said Monday.

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U.S. Defends Opposition to Addict Injection Rooms

REUTERS 

Mon Mar 7, 3:25 PM ET

By *Louis Charbonneau*

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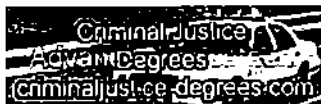
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Updated: March 7th, 2005 10:07:59 AM

U.N. Group on Narcotic Drugs Begins Meeting in Vienna

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Associated Press

VIENNA, Austria (AP) — A United Nations group began reviewing and analyzing international drug policy Monday, meeting amid concerns that increased opium cultivation in Afghanistan threatens the country's stability.

The Commission on Narcotic Drugs, the U.N. policy-making body on drug-related matters, analyzes the world drug situation and develops proposals aimed at solving the global drug problem.

Its 48th session, which began Monday and is set to last for a week, comes after a dramatic increase of drug cultivation in Afghanistan.

Drug production and trafficking has become such a severe problem in Afghanistan that it threatens to undermine the country's stability, the International Narcotics Control Board warned in a report last week. The board, an independent body, is in charge of monitoring implementation of international drug treaties.

A yearly U.N. survey found that in 2004, cultivation of opium poppies in Afghanistan rose 64 percent over the previous year, to 131,000 hectares (324,000 acres).

The Commission on Narcotic Drugs, which is part of the Vienna-based U.N. Office for Drugs and Crime, also will debate on how to combine the battle against drug abuse with efforts to prevent the spread of HIV and other blood-borne diseases.

AIDS groups, human rights groups, researchers and policy analysts from 56 countries urged the commission in an open letter to "support syringe exchange, opiate substitution treatment and other harm-reduction approaches demonstrated to reduce HIV risk."

The letter, distributed by the New York-based Human Rights Watch, accused the United States of exerting pressure on the U.N. drug agency to stop supporting programs that provide drug abusers with clean needles.



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**Global drug policy must address spread of HIV because of drug injection, U.N. official says**

By SUSANNA LOOF

Associated Press Writer

561 words

7 March 2005

11:28

Associated Press Newswires

English

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VIENNA, Austria (AP) - Global drug policy must address the spread of HIV because of drug injection, drug-related traffic accidents and the growing social acceptance among youth toward doing drugs at rave parties, the head of the U.N. drug agency said Monday.

The **Commission on Narcotic Drugs**, the U.N. policy-making body on drug-related matters, began a weeklong meeting to review and analyze international drug policy.

"Governments can, and must, ensure both drug control and HIV prevention," said Antonlo Maria Costa, the head of the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime.

His agency views needle exchanges, where drug abusers can get clean needles, as appropriate as long as they are part of a comprehensive strategy to battle the overall drug problem, he said.

Needle exchanges have been controversial. Supporters say they are crucial to rein in HIV, which is spreading rapidly among drug addicts. Opponents argue they promote drug abuse and hence contradict international drug treaties.

"It depends on how it is done. If it is a stand-alone initiative, not in a comprehensive process of drug control, it could be perceived" as encouraging drug abuse, Costa told The Associated Press.

In a speech to the commission, Costa said that "more resources should be invested in drug control programs aimed at checking the spread of blood-borne diseases."

"We must not deny these addicts any genuine opportunities to remain HIV negative," he said.

In an open letter sent to the commission ahead of the meeting, AIDS groups, human rights groups, researchers and policy analysts from 56 countries urged the commission to "support syringe exchange, opiate substitution treatment and other harm-reduction approaches demonstrated to reduce HIV risk."

The letter, distributed by the New York-based **Human Rights Watch**, accused the United States of exerting pressure on the U.N. drug agency to stop supporting needle exchange programs.

Costa said he had not been exposed to any such pressure, saying U.S. officials had simply informed him of their view.

U.S. drug czar John Walters, who is participating in the commission meeting, said he did not view the ongoing candid debate about policy as pressure.

"Those who suggest that candor is a kind of intimidation I think want to silence debate and discussion," he told a news conference.

Costa also urged countries to intensify roadside drug testing, which he argued had a deterrent effect. Drug policy makers also

must pay attention to raves, where drugs often are abused, he said.

"Young people around the world who participate in drug festivals are sending us a message," he said. "It signals a new trend in drug use; It is a catalyst for drug-related tragedies."

The global drug problem not only threatens people's health, but also several countries' stability and development, Costa said.

Last week, the International Narcotics Control Board warned that drug cultivation and production in Afghanistan has become such a severe problem that the country's stability is at stake. But other countries also are at risk, Costa said.

"Recent terrorist attacks, and their funding, have alerted us to the links between traffickers, syndicates, insurgencies and terror-mongers," he said. "This sinister cartel has generated a new sense of urgency in drug control."

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L'info en continu

08 mars 2005

12:04 US under fire over needle exchanges for AIDS prevention

VIENNA, March 8 (AFP)

Non-governmental organizations have charged at a UN meeting that US opposition to programs offering needle exchanges to drug users to fight the spread of HIV/AIDS is threatening the lives of thousands.

In an open letter to a UN drug meeting that opened in Vienna Monday, the Human Rights Watch group said the United Nations "under pressure from the United States, is being asked to withdraw support from proven HIV prevention strategies at precisely the moment when increased commitment to measures such as syringe exchange and opiate substitution treatment is needed."

"The United States should be encouraging proven HIV prevention strategies, not attacking them," Human Rights Watch said in the letter, written in cooperation with 300 NGO's from 56 countries.

"In most countries outside Africa, the largest number of new infections now occurs among injection drug users," the letter said.

"We must not deny these addicts any genuine opportunities to remain HIV negative," Antonio Maria Costa, head of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) told in Vienna on Monday the 48th session of the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND).

Costa said that contaminated syringes were a major source of transmission of the HIV virus and other diseases including hepatitis, especially among drug users whose capacity for rational thought was diminished.

"We reject the false dichotomy that either drug control prevails, with no consideration for HIV, or that HIV prevention prevails with no consideration for drug abuse," he added.

John Walters, director of the US Office of National drug control policy disagreed, telling reporters at the commission session that the United States remained "concerned about the global danger of HIV/aids transmission."

"The single greatest way of preventing the spread of HIV/aids through drug users is taking those addicted and get them to recover," Walters said.

The United States thinks the UN body "should not be involved with needle exchange because this is promoting drug use," said an unnamed US government official.

But Walters said that the points of agreement in the fight against drug abuse outweighed the differences, saying "there has been a kind of caricature" of the two sides' positions.

But the influential US newspaper, the New York Times, pointed to stark differences of opinion when it said in an editorial last week that "Washington's antipathy toward needle exchanges is a triumph of ideology over science, logic and compassion."

The Times said such exchanges were "a proven weapons against AIDS transmission" and that the US government's blocking money for such programs as it does for abortion programs, "would be an even more deadly mistake."

Jane Francis, a spokeswoman for the Council of Senlis think tank said "forced abstinence does not work if the drug addicts are not ready to stop."

"Needle exchange is the biggest life saver," she said, adding that the idea that "AIDS is getting spread through drug users" was "totally ridiculous."

Costa had said in a letter sent in November to the US State Department that the controversy over US objections to needle exchanges "continue to place... (Costa's office) in a difficult position," according to a copy of the letter obtained by AFP.

Costa said the United Nations does not "endorse needle exchanges as a solution for drug abuse nor support public statements advocating such practices" and feels such "prophylactic measures to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS should be undertaken only within the overall effort to reduce druge abuse," the letter said.

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US under fire over needle exchanges for AIDS prevention

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News

VIENNA (AFP)

Tuesday, March 08, 2005

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Three Pakistani men use old syringes to inject drugs

AFP/File

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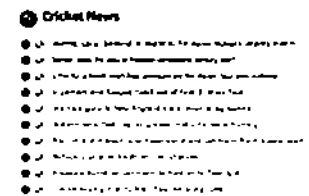
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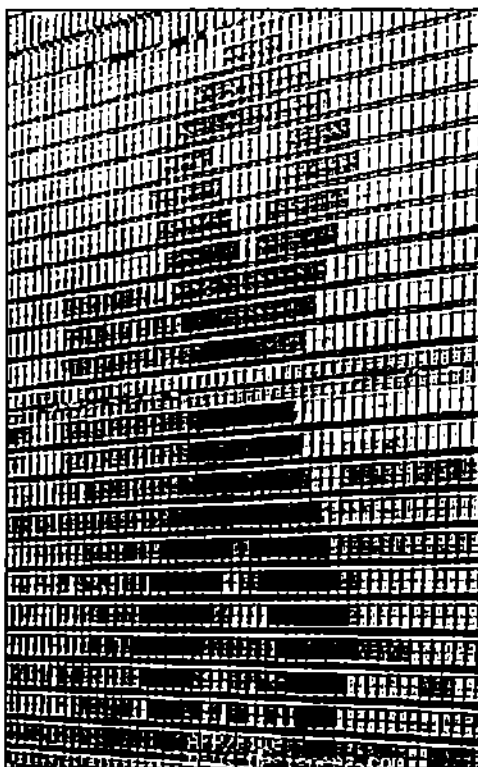


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A red AIDS ribbon is emblazoned on the United Nations headquarters
AFP/File

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"Needle exchange is the biggest life saver," she said, adding that the idea that "**AIDS** is getting spread through drug **users**" was "totally ridiculous."

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obtained by AFP.

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US under fire over needle exchanges for AIDS prevention

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US under fire over needle exchanges for AIDS prevention

VIENNA, March 8 (AFP) - Non-governmental organizations have charged at a UN meeting that US opposition to programs offering needle exchanges to drug users to fight the spread of HIV/AIDS is threatening the lives of thousands.

In an open letter to a UN drug meeting that opened in Vienna Monday, the Human Rights Watch group said the United Nations "under pressure from the United States, is being asked to withdraw support from proven HIV prevention strategies at precisely the moment when increased commitment to measures such as syringe exchange and opiate substitution treatment is needed."

"The United States should be encouraging proven HIV prevention strategies, not attacking them," Human Rights Watch said in the letter, written in cooperation with 300 NGO's from 56 countries.

"In most countries outside Africa, the largest number of new infections now occurs among injection drug users," the letter said.

"We must not deny these addicts any genuine opportunities to remain HIV negative," Antonio Maria Costa, head of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) told in Vienna on Monday the 48th session of the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND).

Costa said that contaminated syringes were a major source of transmission of the HIV virus and other diseases including hepatitis, especially among drug users whose capacity for rational thought was diminished.

"We reject the false dichotomy that either drug control prevails, with no consideration for HIV, or that HIV prevention prevails with no consideration for drug abuse," he added.

John Walters, director of the US Office of National drug control policy disagreed, telling reporters at the commission session that the United States remained "concerned about the global danger of HIV/aids transmission."

"The single greatest way of preventing the spread of HIV/aids through drug users is taking those addicted and get them to recover," Walters said.

The United States thinks the UN body "should not be involved with needle exchange because this is promoting drug use," said an unnamed US government official.

But Walters said that the points of agreement in the fight against drug abuse outweighed the differences, saying "there has been a kind of caricature" of the two sides' positions.

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US under fire over needle exchanges for AIDS prevention



Tue Mar 8, 12:11 PM ET

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US, UN disagreement over needle exchange for AIDS prevention

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Health News

VIENNA (AFP)

Tuesday March 08, 2005

The United Nations and the United States were in **disagreement over** the practice of offering **needle exchanges** to intravenous drug users in a bid to tackle the spread of HIV/AIDS.



A woman waits for a subway train in front of a poster to promote AIDS awareness
AFP/File
AFP/File

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"We must not deny these addicts any genuine opportunities to remain HIV negative," argued Antonio Maria Costa, head of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime.

Opening the 48th session of the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND), Costa said that contaminated **needles** were a major source of transmission of the HIV virus and other diseases including hepatitis, especially among drug users whose capacity for rational thought was diminished.

"We reject the false dichotomy that either drug control prevails, with no consideration for HIV, or that HIV **prevention** prevails with no consideration for drug abuse," he added.

John Walters, director of the US Office of National drug control policy disagreed, but said that the points of agreement in the fight against drug abuse outweighed the differences.

"We are concerned about the global danger of HIV/**aids** transmission... the single greatest way of preventing the spread of HIV/**aids** through drug users is taking those addicted and get them to **recover**," he said.

The US **government** was reproached by the Human Rights Watch and other associations last week for reducing the UN drugs body to "**silence**" over the issue.

The US thinks the UN body "should not be involved with **needle exchange** because this is promoting drug use," said an unnamed US government official.

US, UN disagreement over needle exchange for AIDS prevention

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Posted on Wed, Mar. 09, 2005

Clean needles save lives

Knight Ridder/Tribune News Service

(KRT) - The following editorial appeared in the Chicago Tribune on Tuesday, March 8:

X X X

Clean-needle programs have been shown to be effective in controlling the spread of HIV, hepatitis and other diseases by protecting intravenous drug addicts from contaminated syringes.

And yet, resistance in Washington to such efforts has been strong. Congress prohibited the use of federal funds for such programs unless they were found effective by the Department of Health and Human Services. Former President Bill Clinton declined to lift that ban, even though his HHS secretary made such a finding. President Bush has made no move to lift the ban.

And now some in Congress want to cut off American support for international organizations that provide clean-needle exchanges. Given the reach of U.S. efforts on AIDS, for this country to stop funding organizations that provide needle exchanges would be a blow to worldwide efforts to contain the epidemic.

Though Bush's AIDS program is concentrated in Africa, where the virus spreads mostly through sexual contact, AIDS also is ravaging parts of Eastern Europe, Russia, Central Asia and China. There, 50 percent to 80 percent of the people infected by HIV are drug addicts.

Clean-needle or needle-exchange programs are admittedly an imperfect solution. They don't cure addiction, and narcotics destroy addicts' bodies and minds. But clean needles lessen the chances of addicts contracting AIDS and infecting their sexual partners and their unborn children. Most important, clean needles offer the hope of breaking the chain of contagion.

Rep. Mark Souder, R-Ind., is leading the effort to restrict U.S. funding for international groups that, an aide says, "distribute paraphernalia for the consumption of illegal drugs." Souder would direct funds only to prevention and drug rehabilitation efforts.

It's not hard to understand the position of opponents - they object to the government providing the means for addicts to feed their habits. Many studies, though, have found that needle-exchange programs help to reduce HIV infections and intravenous drug use.

Souder cites a study of a needle-exchange program in Vancouver that, according to his spokesman, demonstrated the "HIV and hepatitis epidemics exploded in the aftermath of the introduction of needle-exchange programs, as did the drug epidemic."

But the doctors who conducted the Vancouver study wrote, in an April letter to the director of the National Institutes of Health, that Souder's interpretation of the data was incorrect. "For Mr. Souder to take the Vancouver data out of context, is selective and self-serving," they wrote.

Medical and legal groups from the American Public Health Association to the American Bar Association have strongly endorsed needle-exchange programs. They are an essential item to fight the spread of AIDS here and abroad.

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Dow Jones & Reuters

**AIDS experts want drug addicts to have better access to clean needles**

By SUSANNA LOOF

Associated Press Writer

470 words

10 March 2005

12:13

Associated Press Newswires

English

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VIENNA, Austria (AP) - Thousands of lives could be saved if more drug users had access to clean needles, reducing the risk of HIV infections, several AIDS experts said Thursday.

The use of dirty needles by intravenous drug users accounts for about 10 percent of all new HIV infections, according to the World Health Organization.

Such infections could be prevented if needle exchanges and other so-called "harm reduction" strategies were implemented universally, said Joanne Csete, the executive director of the Canadian HIV AIDS Legal Network.

But such methods remain controversial, with opponents, including the United States, arguing that they encourage drug use. Supporters say they are the only possibility to rein in transmission of blood-borne diseases among addicts.

"Not every drug user can, in the near term or even in the long term, give up drugs," Csete said in an interview. "It's in the nature of the addiction."

At a briefing held on the sidelines of a meeting of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, the U.N. policy making body on drug issues, Csete called on policy makers to review research by WHO and others that he says demonstrates how effective needle-exchanges can be in stopping HIV.

"How many millions of drug users will die or get very sick before HIV and AIDS among drug users" becomes a priority? she asked.

She argued that the commission, which on Monday began a weeklong meeting to review and analyze global drug policy, was "too timid in its support for drug users' rights to protect themselves from HIV."

In Brazil, needle exchanges have proven effective, said Cristina Pimenta, the chief of HIV/AIDS prevention in the National AIDS Program. In 1995, a quarter of all new HIV cases in Brazil had been transmitted through injection of drugs. That share fell to 13 percent in 2004.

"This decrease is directly related to harm reduction measures implemented during that period," she said.

She also dismissed critics' claims that needle exchanges would promote drug use, saying that "the Brazilian policy does not support or stimulate drug use in any way."

The Commission on Narcotic Drugs is part of the Vienna-based U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime, and its director, Antonio Maria Costa, told a news conference earlier in the week that needle exchanges were appropriate as long as they were part of a comprehensive strategy to tackle the drug problem.

Jonathan Cohen, an HIV/AIDS researcher with the New York-based Human Rights Watch, said the commission

and the U.N. drug agency ought to take a stronger stand in support of harm reduction measures such as needle exchanges.

"There's still a lot of progress to be made," he said.

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canada.com **News**

AIDS experts want drug addicts to have better access to clean needles

Susanna Loof
Canadian Press

March 11, 2005

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U.S. Gag on Needle Exchange Harms U.N. AIDS Efforts Before U.N. Narcotics Meeting, Groups in 56 Countries Assail U.S. Tactics

NEW YORK, NY -- March 2 -- U.S. efforts to force the United Nations to withdraw support for needle exchange programs endanger global efforts to prevent the spread of HIV, a group of AIDS organizations, human rights groups, scientific researchers, and policy analysts from 56 countries said today. The groups urged the United Nations to stand firm at a crucial international policy meeting on narcotic drugs to be held next week in Vienna.

"Silencing the U.N. on needle exchange is deadly diplomacy," said Jonathan Cohen of Human Rights Watch's HIV/AIDS Program, one of the signatories of an open letter released today to urge delegates of the U.N. Commission on Narcotic Drugs not to capitulate to U.S. pressure. "The United States should be encouraging proven HIV prevention strategies, not attacking them."

The U.S., which is the only country in the world to explicitly ban use of federal funds for needle exchange, has recently intensified pressure on the United Nations to stop promotion of this HIV-prevention strategy. Following a meeting with an assistant secretary in the U.S. State Department last November, the head of the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) promised in a widely circulated letter to be "even more vigilant" in reviewing all electronic and printed documents for references to "harm reduction," a term used for syringe exchange and other measures that seek to protect the health of drug users. A senior staff member at UNODC later emailed other employees to "ensure that references to harm reduction and needle/syringe exchange are avoided in UNODC documents, publications and statements."

UNODC is the current chair of the joint U.N. Program on HIV/AIDS, a fact that critics say makes the U.S. pressure on UNODC particularly alarming.

"The fastest growing epidemics in the world are being driven by injection-drug use, and provision of sterile injection equipment is among the most important, proven strategies to contain them," said Kasia Malinowska-Sempruch of the Open Society Institute, another of the letter's signatories. "It is reprehensible that the U.S. would try to compel the U.N. to keep silent about one of the best studied and most effective HIV prevention measures."

Injection-drug use accounts for the majority of HIV cases in China, Iran, Afghanistan, Nepal, the Baltic states, and all of Central Asia, as well as much of Southeast Asia and South America. In Russia, where there are now more cases of HIV than in North America, as many as 80% of infections are attributed to injection drug use.

Syringe exchange has been endorsed as an effective means of HIV-prevention by leading scientific, public health, and medical associations in the United States, including the American Medical Association, the American Public Health Association, and the National Academy of Sciences. The

World Health Organization has also endorsed syringe exchange. Opponents of syringe exchange are among the same U.S. lawmakers who oppose sexually explicit HIV-prevention messages in favor of unproven "abstinence only" approaches.

"Whether it's sex or drugs, the U.S. is exporting an abstinence-only agenda to countries hard hit by HIV/AIDS," said Joanne Csete, executive director of the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network. "If governments do not stand up to this bullying, millions will pay the price."

Human Rights Watch is an independent nongovernmental organization that monitors human rights developments in more than 60 countries worldwide. Human Rights Watch has issued numerous reports on human rights abuses against injection drug users that increase their risk of HIV/AIDS.

The Open Society Institute aims to shape public policy to promote democratic governance, human rights and economic, legal and social reform. On a local level, OSI implements a range of initiatives to support the rule of law, education, public health, and independent media. At the same time, OSI works to build alliances across borders and continents on issues such as combating corruption and rights abuses.

The Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network was founded in 1992 to promote the human rights of people living with and vulnerable to HIV/AIDS, in Canada and internationally, through research, legal and policy analysis, education, advocacy, and community mobilization. The Network is Canada's leading advocacy organization for legal, ethical, and human rights issues raised by HIV/AIDS.

Open Letter to the delegates of the Forty-eighth session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND)

The following letter was endorsed by 334 organizations and individuals in 56 countries.

March 1, 2005

In a year when the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) is chair of the governing body of the UN's Joint Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), we write to express concern about U.S. efforts to force a UNODC retreat from support of syringe exchange and other measures proven to contain the spread of HIV among drug users. Injection drug use accounts for the majority of HIV infections in dozens of countries in Asia and the former Soviet Union, including Russia, China, all of Central Asia, and much of Southeast Asia. In most countries outside Africa, the largest number of new infections now occurs among injection drug users. As UNODC director Antonio Maria Costa noted at the July 2004 International AIDS Conference, effective responses to injection driven AIDS epidemics require expanded HIV prevention, including syringe exchange, rather than policies that accelerate HIV infections through widespread and indiscriminate imprisonment.

Unfortunately, recent events suggest that UNODC-under pressure from the United States-is being asked to withdraw support from proven HIV prevention strategies at precisely the moment when increased commitment to measures such as syringe exchange and opiate substitution treatment is needed. It is particularly alarming that the silencing of UNODC is occurring in a year when the agency is chair of UNAIDS' Committee of Co-sponsoring Organizations and in a year when HIV prevention is a focus of thematic debate at the 48th meeting of the CND. Among the events that have particularly heightened our concern are:

Mr. Costa, who last year expressed support for positive changes in the Russian criminal code, expansion of syringe exchange in countries facing injection driven epidemics and other measures to reduce drug-related harm, has apparently been rebuked by the U.S. State Department. Following a meeting with Robert Charles, U.S. Assistant Secretary for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, Mr. Costa pledged to review all UNODC electronic and printed documents for references to "harm reduction" and to be "even more vigilant in the future."

In Southeast Asia, UNODC has suspended a program that sought reduce drug users' vulnerability to HIV prevention through approaches that emphasized public health and drug users' human rights, rather than punishment.

Even syringe exchange, affirmed as an effective and essential part of HIV prevention by UNAIDS, WHO, and UN member nations, has become politically unpalatable. A November e-mail from a senior UNODC staff member asked junior staff to "to ensure that references to harm reduction and needle/syringe exchange are avoided in UNODC documents, publications and statements."

We recognize that UNODC is dependent on contributions from donor nations, and that the U.S. is the single largest donor to UN drug control. At the same time, the lives of hundreds of thousands depend on sound, scientific approaches to HIV prevention. Numerous studies, including U.S. government studies, have found that strategies such as syringe exchange and methadone maintenance demonstrably diminish HIV transmission and other health risks. The fact that U.S. delegates declare the evidence in support of syringe exchange "unconvincing," as they did in last year's CND session, should not be allowed to determine the course of the UN drug control and HIV prevention efforts, which are inextricably and essentially linked. Nor should UNODC—a co-sponsor of UNAIDS, and an agency with an essential role to play in the course of the HIV epidemic—be asked to refrain from public statements about needle exchange simply because they do not fall within the realm of what the U.S. deems acceptable.

Strategies that attempt solely to achieve abstinence from drug use do not constitute an acceptable alternative to programs, such as syringe exchange, that help active drug users protect themselves from HIV/AIDS. Experience has shown that "zero tolerance" drug control efforts can have the effect of driving injection drug users underground and away from drug treatment and other health services. This is particularly true where, as in many countries, counter-narcotics efforts lead to false arrest, beatings and extortion by police, prolonged detention without trial, forced drug treatment, disproportionate incarceration in cruel conditions and, in some cases, extrajudicial execution. Programs such as syringe exchange and opiate substitution, by contrast, both prevent HIV infection and can provide a bridge to other health services. Restricting these programs is a blatant infringement of drug users' human right to health.

As you gather this year to debate HIV/AIDS prevention and drug abuse, we respectfully urge you to support syringe exchange, opiate substitution treatment and other harm reduction approaches demonstrated to reduce HIV risk; to affirm the human rights of drug users to health and health services; and to reject efforts to overrule science and tie the hands of those working on the front lines. No less than the future of the HIV epidemic is at stake.

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<http://scoop.co.nz/stories/WO0503/S00074.htm>

US Silences UN on Needle Exchange

Thursday, 3 March 2005, 8:47 pm

Press Release: Human Rights Watch

U.S. Gag on Needle Exchange Harms U.N. AIDS Efforts

Before U.N. Narcotics Meeting, Groups in 56 Countries Assail U.S. Tactics

U.S. efforts to force the United Nations to withdraw support for needle exchange programs endanger global efforts to prevent the spread of HIV, a group of AIDS organizations, human rights groups, scientific researchers and policy analysts from 56 countries said today. The groups urged the United Nations to stand firm at a crucial international policy meeting on narcotic drugs to be held next week in Vienna.

“Silencing the United Nations on needle exchange is deadly diplomacy,” said Jonathan Cohen of Human Rights Watch’s HIV/AIDS Program, one of the signatories of an open letter released today to urge delegates of the U.N. Commission on Narcotic Drugs not to capitulate to U.S. pressure. “The United States should be encouraging proven HIV prevention strategies, not attacking them.”

The United States, which is the only country in the world to explicitly ban use of federal funds for needle exchange, has recently intensified pressure on the United Nations to stop promotion of this HIV-prevention strategy. Following a meeting with an assistant secretary in the U.S. State Department last November, the head of the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) promised in a widely circulated letter to be “even more vigilant” in reviewing all electronic and printed documents for references to “harm reduction,” a term used for syringe exchange and other measures that seek to protect the health of drug users. A senior staff member at UNODC later emailed other employees to “ensure that references to harm reduction and needle/syringe exchange are avoided in UNODC documents, publications and statements.”

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“The fastest growing epidemics in the world are being driven by injection-drug use, and provision of sterile injection equipment is among the most important, proven strategies to contain them,” said Kasia Malinowska-Sempruch of the Open Society Institute, another of the letter’s signatories. “It is reprehensible that the United States would try to compel the United Nations to keep silent about one of the best studied and most effective HIV prevention measures.”

Injection-drug use accounts for the majority of HIV cases in China, Iran, Afghanistan, Nepal, the Baltic states, and all of Central Asia, as well as much of Southeast Asia and South America. In Russia, where there are now more cases of HIV than in North America, as many as 80% of infections are attributed to injection drug use.

Syringe exchange has been endorsed as an effective means of HIV-prevention by leading scientific, public health, and medical associations in the United States, including the American Medical Association, the American Public Health Association, and the National Academy of Sciences. The World Health Organization has also endorsed syringe exchange. Opponents of syringe exchange are among the same U.S. lawmakers who oppose sexually explicit HIV-prevention messages in favor of unproven “abstinence only” approaches.

“Whether it’s sex or drugs, the United States is exporting an abstinence-only agenda to countries hard hit by HIV/AIDS,” said Joanne Csete, executive director of the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network. “If governments do not stand up to this bullying, millions will pay the price.”

Human Rights Watch is an independent nongovernmental organization that monitors human rights developments in more than 60 countries worldwide. Human Rights Watch has issued numerous reports on human rights abuses against injection drug users that increase their risk of HIV/AIDS.

The Open Society Institute aims to shape public policy to promote democratic governance, human rights and economic, legal and social reform. On a local level, OSI implements a range of initiatives to support the rule of law, education, public health, and independent media. At the same time, OSI works to build alliances across borders and continents on issues such as combating corruption and rights abuses.

The Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network was founded in 1992 to promote the human rights of people living with and vulnerable to HIV/AIDS, in Canada and internationally, through research, legal and policy analysis, education, advocacy, and community mobilization. The Network is Canada’s leading advocacy organization for legal, ethical, and human rights issues raised by HIV/AIDS.

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US pressure for UN needle/syringe exchange u-turn 'overrules science', campaigners say in open letter prior to Vienna drugs meeting

Edwin J. Bernard, Friday, March 04, 2005

An open letter signed by AIDS organisations, human rights groups, scientific researchers, policy analysts, and influential individuals from 56 countries urges delegates at next week's meeting of the United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs in Vienna to stand up to the US, which appears to have recently pressured the influential UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to reverse its support for needle/syringe exchange and methadone programmes – known under the umbrella term of 'harm reduction'.

"As you gather this year to debate HIV/AIDS prevention and drug abuse, we respectfully urge you to support syringe exchange, opiate substitution treatment and other harm reduction approaches demonstrated to reduce HIV risk; to affirm the human rights of drug users to health and health services; and to reject efforts to overrule science and tie the hands of those working on the front lines," write the letter's signatories, which include Human Rights Watch, the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, the Directorate-General for Justice, Freedom and Security at the European Commission, the National AIDS Trust, AMFAR and former MP, Marjorie 'Mo' Mowlam.

"No less than the future of the HIV epidemic is at stake," the letter concludes.

The letter outlines how the United States – the only country in the world to explicitly ban use of federal funds for needle/syringe exchange – has recently intensified pressure on the United Nations to do a u-turn on its promotion of harm reduction strategies for injection drug users (IDUs).

Last year, the World Health Organisation, UNAIDS and the UNODC released joint statements confirming their support for harm reduction for IDUs, including education, treatment and needle/syringe exchange. However, following a meeting with Robert Charles, the head of the narcotics division of the US State Department last November, UNODC executive director, Antonio Costa, wrote to Mr Charles stating that "we neither endorse needle exchange as a solution for drug abuse, nor support public statements advocating such practices." He also promised to "review all statements... and will be even more vigilant in the future." A senior staff member at UNODC later emailed other employees to "ensure that references to harm reduction and needle/syringe exchange are avoided in UNODC documents, publications and statements."

The UN Office on Drugs and Crime, which counts the US as its biggest donor, is currently the chair of the joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, which, according to Kasia Malinowska-Sempruch of the Open Society Institute, another of the letter's signatories, makes the US pressure on the UNODC "reprehensible."

The letter points out that "injection drug use accounts for the majority of HIV infections in dozens of countries in Asia and the former Soviet Union, including Russia, China, all of Central Asia, and much of Southeast Asia. In most countries outside Africa, the largest number of new infections now occurs among injection drug users." It goes on to say that harm reduction approaches are "affirmed as an effective and essential part of HIV prevention by UNAIDS, WHO, and UN member nations," and that, in contrast to the US-led abstinence approach, "programs such as syringe exchange and opiate substitution...both prevent HIV infection and can provide a bridge to other health services. Restricting

these programs is a blatant infringement of drug users' human right to health."

The full text of the letter can be found at the Human Rights Watch website.

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Kaiser Daily HIV/AIDS Report

Friday, March 04, 2005

Global Challenges

Open Letter From Advocates Urges U.N. Commission on Narcotic Drugs Not To Withdraw From Needle-Exchange Programs

More than 300 scientists, policy analysts, human rights and HIV/AIDS advocacy groups and advocates from 56 countries on Tuesday signed an open letter urging delegates attending next week's meeting of the U.N. Commission on Narcotic Drugs in Vienna, Austria, to "resist" U.S. pressure to withdraw from needle-exchange programs, *Inter Press Service* reports (de la Torre, *Inter Press Service*, 3/2). Of "particular concern" for those who signed the letter is a meeting reported to have taken place in November 2004 between Robert Charles, chief of the State Department's Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, and Antonio Maria Costa, head of the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime, which is a co-sponsor of UNAIDS. Following that meeting, Costa allegedly had "new ideas about omitting certain language from UNODC documents that specifically referred to syringe-exchange programs," according to *Inter Press Service*. The open letter states, "Strategies that attempt solely to achieve abstinence from drug use do not constitute an acceptable alternative to programs, such as syringe exchange, that help active drug users protect themselves from HIV/AIDS" (*Inter Press Service*, 3/2). "Silencing the United Nations on needle exchange is deadly diplomacy," Jonathan Cohen of Human Rights Watch's HIV/AIDS Program, one of the signatories of the letter, said, adding, "The United States should be encouraging proven HIV prevention strategies, not attacking them" (HRW release, 3/3).

Opposition Growing

A "growing opposition" to funding organizations that advocate needle-exchange programs to reduce the spread of HIV among injection drug users is forming among some Bush administration officials and Republican lawmakers, *Inter Press Service* reports (*Inter Press Service*, 3/2). The *Wall Street Journal* reported on Monday that some congressional Republicans have been working to prevent federal funding from going to such groups, with Reps. Mark Souder (R-Ind.) and Tom Davis (R-Va.) leading the effort. Sen. Sam Brownback (R-Kan.) last month in a memo to his political allies outlined a strategy seeking a ban on USAID grants going to any organizations that do not completely support President Bush's views on issues, including drug use. USAID policy already prohibits federal funding from going to needle-exchange efforts (*Kaiser Daily HIV/AIDS Report*, 2/28). Mike Trace, director of the not-for-profit International Drug Policy Consortium and former deputy director of British drug policy, said the United States is attempting to influence the way its donations to U.N. drug projects are being spent, the *Scotsman* reports. "They are saying they don't want money to go to any part of the world unless people sign up to neo-conservative moral values," Trace said, adding that the United States might "further pressure" delegates at the U.N. drug commission meeting next week, according to the *Scotsman* (Barrett, *Scotsman*, 3/1).

U.S. Drug Policy Coordinator Defends Bush Administration Policy

Director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy John Walters on Thursday at a press conference in the U.S. embassy in London said that scientific studies of drug addiction do not support "harm reduction" policies such as needle exchange, the United Kingdom's *Scotsman* reports. "There is a serious issue about what are the measures that most effectively reduce harm, but the best thing is prevention, second is treatment and third is harm reduction, which is better than doing nothing," Walters said, adding, "I think we should not be caught up with silly semantics -- we all want to reduce the harm" (Barrett, *Scotsman*, 3/3). However, a September 2003 Human Rights Watch report on HIV prevention among injection drug users said that seven U.S. government-funded reports between 1991 and 1997 "found that syringe exchange reduced HIV transmission without increasing drug use" and that "no established medical, scientific or legal body to study the issue had concluded otherwise," according to a 2001 review of needle-exchange research (*Inter Press Service*, 3/2). Walters added that "cracking down" on supply and demand for illegal drugs is "a far more effective approach" than harm reduction and that "scarce resources" available for drug users should be used for treatment, according to the *Scotsman* (*Scotsman*, 3/3).


Open Letter From Advocates Urges U.N. Commission on Narcotic Drugs Not To Withdraw From Needle-Exchange Programs

05 Mar 2005

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Kaiser Daily HIV/AIDS Report

Tuesday, March 08, 2005

Politics and Policy

U.S., U.N. Drug Policy Heads Disagree on Needle Exchange for HIV/AIDS Prevention

Director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy John Walters and Antonio Maria Costa, head of the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime, on Monday at the 48th session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs in Vienna, Austria, disagreed over the practice of using needle-exchange programs to curb HIV transmission among injection drug users, AFP/Yahoo! News reports (AFP/Yahoo! News, 3/7). Costa said UNODC views needle exchanges, in which injection drug users can turn in used needles and obtain clean ones, as "appropriate as long as they are part of a comprehensive strategy to battle the overall drug problem," the Associated Press reports (Loof, Associated Press, 3/7). He said that contaminated needles are a "major source" of infection with HIV and other diseases, including hepatitis, especially among injection drug users, according to AFP/Yahoo! News. "We must not deny these addicts any genuine opportunities to remain HIV-negative," Costa said in a speech to open the CND session. He added, "We reject the false dichotomy that either drug control prevails, with no consideration for HIV, or that HIV prevention prevails with no consideration for drug abuse" (AFP/Yahoo! News, 3/7). However, Walters said drug use itself -- not a lack of needle exchanges or other programs for drug users, such as safe injection sites -- is "behind the danger" of HIV and other bloodborne diseases, Reuters reports. "Continued drug use is a fundamental cause of the dangers we face from bloodborne diseases," Walters said (Charbonneau, Reuters, 3/7). However, Walters added that the "points of agreement" between himself and Costa in the fight against illegal drug use "far outweighed the differences," according to AFP/Yahoo! News. "[T]he single greatest way of preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS through drug users is taking those addicted and get them to recover," Walters said (AFP/Yahoo! News, 3/7).

Under Pressure?

An unnamed U.S. government official at the meeting said that the CND "should not be involved with needle exchange because this is promoting drug use." However, Costa in a November 2004 letter to the State Department said that the United Nations does not "endorse needle exchanges as a solution for drug abuse nor support public statements advocating such practices" and feels such "prophylactic measures to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS should be undertaken only within the overall effort to reduce drug abuse." The letter also said U.S. objections to needle exchanges "continue to place ... [UNODC] in a difficult position," AFP/Tribune de Geneve reports (AFP/Tribune de Geneve, 3/8). Walters on Monday at a news conference said that he does not view the ongoing "candid debate" about drug policy as "pressure," according to the Associated Press. "Those who suggest that candor is a kind of intimidation I think want to silence debate and discussion," Walters said (Associated Press, 3/7).

Open Letter

More than 300 scientists, policy analysts, human rights and HIV/AIDS advocacy groups and

advocates from 56 countries last week released an open [letter](#) expressing "concern about U.S. efforts to force a UNODC retreat from support of syringe exchange and other measures proven to contain the spread of HIV among drug users" and urging delegates attending the CND session to resist such pressure. The letter states, "Strategies that attempt solely to achieve abstinence from drug use do not constitute an acceptable alternative to programs, such as syringe exchange, that help active drug users protect themselves from HIV/AIDS." Of particular concern for those who signed the letter was a meeting reported to have taken place in November 2004 between Costa and Robert Charles, chief of the State Department's [Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs](#). Following that meeting, Costa allegedly expressed new ideas about omitting from UNODC documents specific language that referred to needle-exchange programs ([Kaiser Daily HIV/AIDS Report](#), 3/4).



U.S., U.N. Drug Policy Heads Disagree on Needle Exchange for HIV/AIDS Prevention

09 Mar 2005

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UN Commitment to HIV/AIDS Reduction Hurt By U.S. Pressure

Tuesday, March 8, 2005

At a meeting this week of the United Nations' main drug policy-making body, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND), the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) caved to pressure from U.S. drug warriors to stop promoting scientifically sound harm reduction policies that prevent HIV/AIDS transmission among intravenous drug users.

The CND meeting, held annually in Vienna, has garnered a lot of attention this year because of the UNODC's shift in stance - a change that is especially worrisome given the office's role as the current chair of the joint UN Program on HIV/AIDS.

At last year's Bangkok International AIDS Conference, the Executive Director of the UNODC, Antonio Maria Costa, said, "During the past decade, we have also learned that the HIV/AIDS epidemic among injecting drug users can be stopped - and even reversed - if drug users are provided, at an early stage and on a large scale, with comprehensive services such as outreach, provision of clean injecting equipment and a variety of treatment modalities, including substitution treatment. ...In too many countries, drug users are simply incarcerated. This is not a solution; in fact, it contributes to the rapid increase in the number of people living with HIV/AIDS."

The office started backpedaling on this position after a November 2004 meeting with the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, where Costa was told UNODC's funding could be cut if he did not pull back from UNODC's support of needle exchange and other harm reduction programs. As the U.S. is the largest funder of the UNODC, it appears that Costa took the threat to heart.

UNODC's reversal of its commitment to needle exchange contradicts the general UN consensus on the usefulness of harm reduction in HIV/AIDS prevention, as well as that of the U.S. scientific community. The American Medical Association, American Public Health Association and National Academy of Sciences all have endorsed needle exchange as an effective means of HIV-prevention, and noted that such programs do not increase drug use. The U.S. government's contrary position was articulated in remarks by drug czar John Walters at the opening of the CND meeting when he spoke against "acquiescing or practicing appeasement with addiction."

The ability of Walters and a small cadre of other reactionary politicians to manipulate the global response to HIV/AIDS because of an ideological bias spells disaster for places such as Central Asia, Russia, China and Iran, where the majority of HIV cases are attributable to injection-drug use. Leading up to the CND meeting, both the Washington Post and the New York Times editorialized against the U.S.'s attacks on needle exchange, and over 300 organizations worldwide signed a letter to the delegates of the CND asking them to resist pressure to withdraw support from proven HIV prevention strategies. Despite this high-profile condemnation of the U.S.'s tactics, Mr. Costa's opening speech at the meeting included the message, "We unequivocally reject any initiative, well intended as it may be, that could lead to the perpetuation of drug abuse."

Information for this report comes from the Transnational Institute. For a more in-depth discussion, please see their briefing, The United Nations and Harm Reduction.

See also Aryeh Neier's piece, "U.S. Ideologues Put Millions at Risk," in the International Herald Tribune.



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Tuesday, 22 March 2005

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HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SPOKESMAN'S NOON BRIEFING

BY MARIE OKABE

ASSOCIATE

SPOKESWOMAN FOR THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

UN HEADQUARTERS, NEW YORK

Tuesday, March 8, 2005

**ANNAN: PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IS EVERYONES
RESPONSIBILITY**

Today is

International Womens Day.

In a

message to mark the day,

Secretary-General Kofi Annan said that this year marks a milestone in the movement for gender equality and the advancement of women, with the 10-year review of the

Beijing Conference and Platform for Action.

As a result of the conference, the world has recognized that gender equality is critical to the development and peace of every nation, the Secretary-General said, adding that that now, ten years on, theres been tangible progress on many fronts, and women are not only more aware of their rights; theyre more able to exercise them.

(. . .)

In a

message, the Secretary-General welcomed today's meeting as a strong expression of support for the Global Compact, a voluntary corporate citizenship initiative based on universal values in human rights, labor, the environment and anti-corruption.

He says the meeting is also a contribution to the wider process of change and renewal at the United Nations.

OTHER ANNOUNCEMENTS

GENERAL ASSEMBLY ADOPTS DECLARATION ON CLONING: The General Assembly this morning

adopted by a vote the United Nations Declaration on Human Cloning. The Declaration calls on Member States to prohibit all forms of human

cloning inasmuch as they are incompatible with human dignity and the protection of human life. It also calls on Member States to adopt all measures necessary to adequately protect human life in the application of life sciences, and to prohibit the application of genetic engineering techniques that may be contrary to human dignity.

FISTULA FORTNIGHT REACHES 545 WOMEN: During the recent Fistula Fortnight campaign in Nigeria, initiated in part by the UN Population Fund, a total of 545 women were

treated for obstetric fistula. For two weeks, national and international volunteer doctors joined forces to perform surgery on women suffering from the pregnancy-related disability. The campaign raised awareness in rural communities that treatment for the condition is indeed available.

DRUG COMMISSIONS SESSION GETS UNDERWAY: The 48th Biennial Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs

began yesterday in Vienna and will run until 14 March. Speaking in Vienna, Antonio Maria Costa, Executive Director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, addressed progress made in the global fight against illegal drugs, drug trafficking, and drug abuse. He also rejected the notion that strong drug control measures cannot coexist with policies designed to contain the spread of HIV/AIDS.

POST-TSUNAMI FISHERIES IN FOCUS THIS WEEK: Finding ways to responsibly

rebuild fisheries in tsunami-struck countries is one of the issues being discussed by the

Food and Agriculture Organizations Committee on Fisheries (COFI),



Bush Admin's 'Ideological' Approach to HIV/AIDS Prevention Impedes Efforts To Fight Disease, Opinion Piece Says

16 Mar 2005

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Although "fair-minded" people would not accuse the United States of being "stingy" in the global fight against HIV/AIDS, the Bush administration's "ideological" approach to HIV/AIDS prevention "creates headaches" for the country's global partners and hinders efforts to help stop the spread of HIV, columnist Carol Goar writes in a... *Toronto Star* opinion piece. Efforts by the Bush administration to "discourag[e]" condom use, as well as the administration's "resist[ance]" to generic antiretroviral drugs and determination to "have nothing to do" with needle-exchange programs, "impede" the fight against the HIV/AIDS pandemic, according to Goar. The results of the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime's 48th session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs in Vienna, Austria, which ended Monday, will "show how far America's allies are prepared to go to accommodate its doctrinaire approach" to HIV/AIDS prevention, Goar says (Goar, *Toronto Star*, 3/14). UNODC views needle exchanges, in which injection drug users can turn in used needles and obtain clean ones, as part of a comprehensive strategy to fight drug use. However, the United States views needle-exchange programs as promoting drug use and says that drug use itself – not a lack of clean needles – is behind the danger of HIV and other bloodborne diseases (*Kaiser Daily HIV/AIDS Report*, 3/8). Although some AIDS advocates have urged the meeting delegates "not to be bullied into endorsing the U.S. position" on needle-exchange programs, it appeared as though meeting delegates would endorse a "bland consensus" that would allow the United States to "keep flexing its financial and political muscles behind the scenes," Goar says, concluding that for "all its resources and good intentions," the United States is a "tragically blinkered general in a fight the world can't afford to lose" (*Toronto Star*, 3/14).

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