



Investing in our future

The Global Fund

To Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria

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6 February 2009

Her Excellency Ms Selma Ashipala-Musavyi
Permanent Representative of Namibia to the United Nations at Vienna
Chairperson of the 52nd Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs
Embassy of the Republic of Namibia
Strozzigasse 10-14
1080 VIENNA
Austria

Your Excellency

I write to you in my capacity as the Executive Director of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria to express concern about the absence of harm reduction from the draft outcome documents for the 52nd session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. The Global Fund is the largest multilateral funder in the fight against AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, and the largest funder of HIV prevention for injecting drug users. Harm reduction programs are a key part of a comprehensive response to AIDS. Approximately US\$154 million through 60 grants is directed to harm-reduction-related activities.

I, myself, have been involved in AIDS since the early days of the epidemic. I have seen the suffering caused by the disease and I have seen the way people's lives are restored when they have access to treatment, clean needles, opiate substitution therapy, and a comprehensive package of services that includes medical care, social services and peer support. As a doctor, researcher and advocate for science-based public-health policies, I have long asserted that harm reduction is an essential, evidence-based AIDS response. I am not alone in my conviction: there is an overwhelming body of scientific literature that supports this, and harm-reduction approaches have been endorsed by the UN General Assembly and in numerous UN documents, including in reports from UNAIDS, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the World Health Organisation, UN Office on Drugs and Crime, and the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. While the AIDS epidemic is coming to a plateau globally, it is growing in all regions where the epidemic is associated with injecting drug use -- a paradox when you consider that the evidence for harm reduction is so abundant and compelling.

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Her Excellency Ms Selma Ashipala-Musavyi

Drug-related laws and policies should not compromise the health and human rights of people who use drugs. I urge you to send a strong message to the world with clear and specific language that calls for comprehensive harm reduction services. Because the Vienna outcome documents will help provide the framework for drug policy and control efforts, what is included, and excluded, from the final declaration will send an important message to member states, policy makers and public-health advocates.

It is my hope that member states will live up to their international obligations and recognize the benefit of harm reduction, an approach that promotes human rights, benefits communities, and saves lives.

Yours sincerely



Professor Michel Kazatchkine
Executive Director

cc: His Excellency Mr Ali Asghar Soltanieh, Ambassador, Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Vienna, Vice-Chairperson of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs at its 52nd Session.
Mr David Best, Counsellor, Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations Office, Vienna, Vice-Chairperson of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs at its 52nd Session.
Mr Rajat Gupta, Chair of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.
Ms Elizabeth Mataka, Vice-Chair of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.