

## **“Drug User Activists Declare a Statement About The International Network of People Who Use Drugs”**

On Sunday, 30 April 2006 more than 100 drug user activists from across the world gathered in Vancouver, Canada for the International Drug User Activists Congress and for the 17th Conference On The Reduction of Drug Related Harm which is a 5-day conference. The Sunday Congress was the first such event to unite activists working to support the health and human rights of people who use drugs in Asia, Australia, North America, Eastern and Western Europe and Latin America.

International user activists discussed a statement about the international network of activists who use drugs. At the end of the congress the statement was officially declared and read to the participating activists.

I'm very proud to present to you the Statement about the international network of people who use drugs:

### **Why the world needs an international network of activists who use drugs.**

We are people from around the world who use drugs. We are people who have been marginalized and discriminated against; we have been killed, harmed unnecessarily, put in jail, depicted as evil, and stereotyped as dangerous and disposable . Now it is time to raise our voices as citizens, establish our rights and reclaim the right to be our own spokespersons striving for self-representation and self-empowerment:

- ⌘ To enable and empower people who use drugs legal or deemed illegal worldwide to survive, thrive and exert our voices as human beings to have meaningful input into all decisions that affect our own lives
- ⌘ To promote a better understanding of the experiences of people who use illegal drugs, and particularly of the destructive impact of current drug policies affecting drug users, as well as our non-using fellow-citizens: this is as an important element in the local, national, regional and international development of these social policies.
- ⌘ To use our own skills and knowledge to train and educate others, particularly our peers and any other fellow-citizens concerned with drugs in our communities.
- ⌘ To advocate for universal access to all the tools available to reduce the harm that people who use drugs face in their day-to-day lives, including, i) drug treatment, appropriate medical care for substance use , ii) regulated access to the pharmaceutical quality drugs we need ii) availability of safer consumption equipment, including syringes and pipes as well as iii) facilities for their safe disposal, iv) peer outreach and honest up-to-date information about drugs and all of their uses, including v) safe consumption facilities that are necessary for many of us.
- ⌘ To establish our right to evidence-based and objective information about drugs, and how to protect ourselves against the potential negative impacts of drug use through universal access to equitable and comprehensive health and social services, safe,

affordable, supportive housing and employment opportunities

- ⌘ To provide support to established local, national, regional, and international networks of people living with HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis and other harm reduction groups, making sure that active drug users are included at every level of decision-making, and specifically that we are able to serve on the boards (of directors) of such organizations and be fairly reimbursed for our expenses, time and skills.
- ⌘ To challenge the national legislation and international conventions that currently disable most of us from living safe, secure and healthy lives.

Well aware of the potential challenges of building such a network, we strive for:

- Value and respect diversity and recognize each other's different backgrounds, knowledge, skills and capabilities, and cultivate a safe and supportive environment within the network regardless of which drugs we use or how we use them
- Spread information about our work in order to support and encourage development of user organizations in communities/countries where there are no such organizations
- Promote tolerance, cooperation and collaboration, fostering a culture of inclusion and active participation.
- Democratic principles and creating a structure that promotes maximum participation in decision making,
- Maximum inclusion with special focus to those who are disproportionately vulnerable to oppression on the basis of their gender identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, religion, etc.
- to ensure that people who use drugs are not incarcerated and that those who are incarcerated have an equal right to healthy and respectful conditions and treatment, including drug treatment and access to health-promoting supplies such as syringes and condoms and medical treatment or at least equal to that they would receive outside
- to challenge execution and other inhuman treatment of people who use drugs worldwide

Ultimately, the most profound need to establish such a network arises from the fact that no group of oppressed people ever attained liberation without the involvement of those directly affected by this oppression. Through collective action, we will fight to change existing local, national, regional and international drug laws and formulate an evidence-based drug policy that respects people's human rights and dignity instead of one fuelled on moralism, stereotypes and lies.

The International Activists who use drugs  
30 April 2006, Vancouver Canada

The attending international activists formed a regionally balanced transitional steering comity to establish the international network and to present it as a reliable partner to third party's for the involvement and participation of people who use drugs in local, regional and global drugs policy making. This are the members of the transitional steering comity:

|                  |                |
|------------------|----------------|
| Karin Kaplan     | Thailand       |
| Annie Madden     | Australia      |
| Milena Naydenova | Bulgaria       |
| Andria Efthimiou | United Kingdom |
| Zarir Simrin     | Macedonia      |
| Jon Zibbel       | United States  |
| Luiz Guanabara   | Brazil         |
| Stijn Goossens   | Belgium        |

We thank everybody involved in getting to this shifting point, uniting the people who use drugs on a global scale.

The statement (in English) will now be translated to the languages of the home country's of drug user activists. The translating process should take place in May (=now). The translation has to be done by official translators.

On the other hand we start gathering signatures from people who use drugs around the world. We ask to read the statement and and if people agree to also sign the statement. Because of our globally spread network we should be able to gather a few thousand signatures in a few weeks time starting now.

Half of June we write a covering letter to accompany the declaration about the network of people who use drugs and the signatures. We send this package out to national and international institutions, organizations, etc. We mean hereby institutions and organizations like UNAIDS, WHO, EU-Commission, Amnesty, UNODC, etc. We present the network as a reliable partner to third party's for the involvement and participation of people who use drugs in local, regional and global drugs policy making.

The transitional steering comity will further develop the network during summer. We work to have the network operational from autumn on.

Stijn Goossens  
[www.hardcoreharmreducer.be](http://www.hardcoreharmreducer.be)