

PRESS STATEMENT

UNAIDS urges countries to move towards a public health and human rights approach to people who use drugs

NEW YORK/GENEVA, 19 April 2016—UNAIDS welcomes the United Nations General Assembly’s call for Member States to consider effective public health measures to improve outcomes for people who use drugs and urges countries to implement programmes that reduce the impact of the harms associated with drug use.

The outcome document adopted by Member States at the United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on the World Drug Problem, being held in New York, United States of America, calls on countries to consider measures such as appropriate medication-assisted therapy, injecting equipment programmes and antiretroviral therapy to prevent the transmission of HIV, viral hepatitis and other bloodborne viruses.

The outcome document also underlines the need for the full respect of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of people who use drugs, including a fair trial and proportionate sentencing for people arrested for or convicted of drugs offences. It encourages countries to consider alternatives to punishment.

“The world has taken a step towards a more rational and compassionate approach to people who inject drugs,” said the UNAIDS Executive Director, Michel Sidibé. “Countries can only reverse their HIV epidemics by implementing policies and programmes that are proved to work and put people first, including people who use drugs.”

In the lead-up to the UNGASS, UNAIDS has stressed that there is insufficient coverage of harm reduction programmes and that policies that criminalize and marginalize people who use drugs are failing to reduce HIV infections, especially among people who inject drugs. There was no reduction in the number of new HIV infections among people who inject drugs between 2010 and 2014. The world has missed the United Nations General Assembly’s target set in 2011 to reduce HIV transmission among people who inject drugs by 50% by 2015.

The newly published UNAIDS report, ***Do no harm: health, human rights and people who use drugs***, shows that countries that implement health- and rights-based approaches have reduced new HIV infections among people who inject drugs. Countries that stop putting people in prison for drugs offences but give them access to expanded treatment programmes report the best results. Countries should commit to treating people with support and care, rather than punishment. UNAIDS recommends decriminalization and stopping incarceration of people for the consumption and possession of drugs for personal use.

The UNGASS outcome document recognizes the need for closer cooperation between health, education, justice and law enforcement authorities and emphasizes the role of civil society, the scientific community and academia in addressing the world drug problem. It reiterates the General Assembly’s commitment to end the epidemics of AIDS and tuberculosis as part of the

Sustainable Development Goals and to reduce the impact of viral hepatitis and other infectious diseases, including among people who use drugs.

The UNAIDS **Fast-Track approach** has a set of targets for 2020 that include reducing new HIV infections to fewer than 500 000. It also calls on countries to ensure that 90% of the more than 12 million people who inject drugs worldwide have access to combination HIV prevention services, including needle–syringe programmes, opioid substitution therapy, condoms and access to counselling, care, testing and treatment services for tuberculosis and bloodborne viruses such as HIV and hepatitis B and C. Achieving these targets will be a significant step towards ending the AIDS epidemic as a public health threat by 2030.

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UNAIDS

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) leads and inspires the world to achieve its shared vision of zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths. UNAIDS unites the efforts of 11 UN organizations—UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, UN Women, ILO, UNESCO, WHO and the World Bank—and works closely with global and national partners towards ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030 as part of the Sustainable Development Goals. Learn more at unaids.org and connect with us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Youtube.