

Position Statement - "*Drug Use: A Public Health and Human Rights Problem*"

Beirut - On the occasion of June 26, 2013; the "International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking" and the "International Day in Support of Victims of Torture", the Middle East and North Africa Harm Reduction Association (MENAHRRA) commends the countries of the region that have moved towards the adoption and implementation of harm reduction strategies.

MENAHRRA maintains and asserts that drug use is not a crime to be dealt with through prosecution and imprisonment, but is a health problem. Drug users need to be heard and treated as equal members of society with civil rights. As it stands now, they are marginalized and isolated in their communities and therefore often unemployed. This phenomenon needs urgent action!

The Network also supports Opioid Substitution Therapy (OST), which is another type of treatment to reduce drug-related harm. OST is available in 77 countries around the world, and has proved to be effective in terms of drug user commitment to treatment. In addition, OST has been shown to reduce the rates of overdose and the occurrence of risk behaviours (such as sharing needles) as it helps them avoid the risk of contracting Hepatitis B and C, HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STI).

The MENAHRRA Network supports the rights of people who use drugs to access the few available health services. In addition, it also supports harm reduction strategies that are usually absent from the agendas of decision makers. Such strategies include needle/syringe programs and clean paraphernalia to ensure the safety of people who use drugs and protect them from transmitted infections and the consequences of sharing needles on their health. It is worth mentioning that overdose in countries of the region is still noticeable, and overdose prevention efforts are still low, which increases the number of deaths among drug users. This issue is no longer acceptable at a time when such deaths are preventable.

Therefore, the MENAHRRA Network strongly urges policy-makers to include harm reduction strategies in the national health strategic plans of their countries, support drug user rights in treatment and integration into society, and support the provision of necessary care and requirements of a decent living. Supporting these rights will positively impact on the health of drug users leading to an increased social acceptance and improved public health in the concerned countries. MENAHRRA also calls to allocate more funds in national budgets in order to implement harm reduction projects.

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MENAHRRA is an International NGO, registered in Beirut - Lebanon under the Presidential Decree Number 7491. MENAHRRA is composed of three knowledge Hubs (in Iran, Lebanon and Morocco), and of a Network Secretariat (in Lebanon) and covers 20 countries of the MENA region. The main goal of MENAHRRA is to strengthen the civil society in implementing Harm reduction in the MENA region.