

Asia-Pacific High-level Intergovernmental Meeting on the Assessment of Progress Against Commitments in the Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS and the Millennium Development Goals

IDPC/TNI Oral Statement

1. Highlighting the need to focus efforts on people who inject drugs

- In the Asia-Pacific region, people who inject drugs are one of the population groups most vulnerable to HIV transmission—often due to the unsafe use of non-sterile needles or syringes
- Unsafe injecting practices continue because of the lack of coverage of evidence-based HIV prevention measures such as needle and syringe programmes
- It is clear that the goals of MDG 6 and the Political Declaration can only be achieved by placing public health and human rights at the centre of drug policy responses.

2. Key legislative and political barriers in the region that prevent scaled up and sustainable HIV prevention measures for people who inject drugs:

- First, the use of drugs remains heavily criminalised in virtually all regional countries
 - Criminalising people who use drugs undermines public health outcomes because it drives them away from life-saving health services.
- Second, drug dependence treatment services available for people dependent on drugs are not based upon international best practice or scientific evidence.
 - Many countries still resort to detention and compulsory treatment of people who use drugs.
- Third, there are not enough needle and syringe exchange programs available for people who use drugs.
 - Governments remain resistant to the sustainable scale-up of such programmes and are not proactive in removing policy and legislative barriers to their implementation.
- These policy and legislative barriers to reducing HIV prevalence amongst people who use drugs are underpinned by a deeper problem: governments persisting with drug control policies that rely on law enforcement and punitive solutions.

3. Proposed options for addressing policy and legislative barriers to reducing HIV prevalence amongst people who use drugs

- a) Remove criminal penalties for people who use drugs
- b) Remove political and legislative barriers preventing the provision of needle and syringe exchange programmes, and implement and scale up evidence-based and effective drug treatment services
- c) Provide awareness-raising and training for law enforcement to prevent the harassment of people who use drugs, and to instead, direct them towards available harm reduction and evidence-based drug treatment services.
- d) Reforming drug treatment services towards an evidence-based voluntary, comprehensive, and community-centred models