

WORLD MEDICAL ASSOCIATION AND INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF HEALTH AND HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANISATIONS

News Release

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CALL FOR COMPULSORY DRUG DETENTION CENTRES TO BE CLOSED

The World Medical Association and the International Federation of Health and Human Rights Organisations today (Tuesday) condemned the operation of administrative drug detention centres for users of controlled substances. The two organisations stated that because they violated the human rights of people detained in the facilities and operated without following accepted principles of medical treatment they should be closed.

They said the detention centres, sometimes referred to as compulsory detoxification centres, drug rehabilitation centres and education and labour centres, were institutions in which people testing positive or suspected of illicit drug use were detained against their will. Such systems detained people routinely and were estimated to detain 400,000 people worldwide. The facilities were neither part of the criminal justice system nor did they provide evidence-based rehabilitation treatment. While doctors sometimes worked inside the centres, they were typically run by police or the military and suspected drug users were often detained without regard to legal standards, procedural safeguards or actual need for treatment.

Authorities that detained drug-dependent people in facilities that offered no treatment and often indulged in forced labour and other abuses of detainees was a practice that both the WMA and the IFHHRO denounced out of hand as it contravened ethical behaviour.

Dr. Wonchat Subhachaturas, President of the WMA, said:

‘The medical community has recognised that treatment of addiction, like treatment for any disease or condition, should be undertaken in the best interests of the patient and according to established principles of medical ethics. Drug therapy should be administered according to professional guidelines and supervised by specially trained physicians’.

The IFHHRO and the WMA said individuals who used or were addicted to controlled substances retained their fundamental human rights, including the right to the highest attainable standard of health and freedom from discrimination, arbitrary detention, torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. They had a right to equitable access to medical treatment and allied rehabilitation services in accordance with generally approved medical principles.

Dr. Adriaan van Es, Director of the International Federation of Health and Human Rights Organisations, said:

‘As in other forms of medical care, drug dependency treatment should be voluntary and should respect and validate the autonomy of the individual. Patients should be fully



informed about the risks and benefits of treatment choices. Furthermore, programmes should create supportive environments and relationships to facilitate treatment, provide coordinated treatment of co-morbid mental and physical disorders, and address relevant psychosocial factors'.

In joining other organisations in calling for the closure of these detention centres the two organisations urged that these facilities should be replaced with evidence-based, voluntary drug treatment in the community that conformed to ethical standards and human rights norms.

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The International Federation of Health and Human Rights Organisations (IFHHRO) is committed to the protection and promotion of health-related human rights, including the Right to Health and focuses on the important role of health workers in this regard. To increase the involvement of health workers, IFHHRO stimulates international cooperation between health and human rights organisations in various countries. Our institutional members are doctors' associations interested in human rights work, human rights groups paying attention to health-related rights violations, or organisations that have been especially created to mobilise health workers for human rights protection.

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The World Medical Association is the independent confederation of national medical associations from 97 countries and represents more than nine million physicians. Acting on behalf of patients and physicians, the WMA endeavours to achieve the highest possible standards of medical care, ethics, education and health-related human rights for all people.