

GROWING PEOPLE POWER



SUPPORT. DON'T PUNISH
2022 GLOBAL DAY OF ACTION
SUMMARY REPORT



Growing people power:

The Support. Don't Punish 2022 Global Day of Action


February 2023

Authored by: *Dania Putri*


Edited by: *Juan Fernández Ochoa*


Design and layout: *Rudy Tun-Sánchez*


Cover photo: March organised by APROSAM in San Pedro, Ivory Coast


 supportdontpunish.org

 campaign@idpc.net

 facebook.com/supportdontpunish

 twitter.com/SDPcampaign

 instagram.com/supportdontpunish

 [Newsletter: eepurl.com/dtxD4f](https://eepurl.com/dtxD4f)

Support. Don't Punish is a global, decentralised and grassroots-centred campaign that mobilises communities targeted by and resisting repressive drug policies, and their allies. Under a common banner, we promote **harm reduction and drug policies that prioritise health, human rights and well-being.**

The campaign seeks to raise the profile of harm reduction and sustainable responses to drugs by strengthening communities' mobilisation capacity, opening dialogue with policy-makers, and raising awareness among the media and the public.

TABLE OF CONTENTS



Support. Don't Punish exhibition with highlights from activities worldwide.
Photo: Finnish Association for Humane Drug Policy (HPP)

Campaign supporters in Argentina.
Photo: Intercambios



04

KEY MESSAGES
+ KEY NUMBERS

05

INTRODUCTION

07

ANCHORING POLICIES
AND POLICYMAKING
PROCESSES IN REALITIES
ON THE GROUND

10 - Highlight: Nigeria

13

SOLIDIFYING PEOPLE
POWER

18 - Highlight: Philippines

20

CHALLENGING
CRIMINALISATION AT
ITS CORE

21 - Highlight: Colombia

26 - Highlight: Portugal

30

BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

31

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

KEY MESSAGES OF THE CAMPAIGN

The drug control system is broken and in need of reform.

People who use drugs should not be criminalised.

People involved in the drug trade should not face harsh or disproportionate punishments.

The death penalty should never be imposed for drug offences.

Drug policy should focus on health, well-being, harm reduction and meaningful community engagement.

Drug policy budgets need rebalancing to ensure health and harm reduction-based responses are adequately financed.

KEY NUMBERS OF THE DAY OF ACTION

327

events worldwide

281

participating cities

91

participating countries

100+

media items

INTRODUCTION



Photo: IDCHS

It has been two years since the Covid-19 pandemic began and **wreaked havoc** across continents. The socioeconomic harms triggered by the pandemic – and the unjust policies that come with it – have had long-lasting impacts on communities. But 2022 turns out to be the year of slow recovery for many people-led initiatives and movements.

From São Paulo to Lima to Edmonton, from Maseru to Helsinki to New Delhi, and all the way down to Sydney, Support. Don't Punish campaigners worked together to organise activities countering the 'war on drugs' and advancing sustainable alternatives instead.

Their areas of focus, priorities, and strategies of choice differ greatly, and they may even have disagreements on the way forward. Still, united under a shared banner, they occupied different spaces of struggle and

change-making, bringing the Support. Don't Punish messages to parliament buildings, public parks, radio stations, online meeting rooms, and many more.

In addition to popular mobilisations for the human rights of people who use drugs and other populations affected by punitive drug policies, a growing number of campaigners adopted an intersectional approach to campaigning, bringing into sharp focus issues related to gender and economic injustice.

This report summarises activities carried out as part of the Support. Don't Punish Global Day of Action in 2022. In their own unique ways, these activities help connect policymaking processes with realities on the ground, solidify people power, and challenge criminalisation at its core.

“

A growing number of campaigners adopted an intersectional approach to campaigning, bringing into sharp focus issues related to gender and economic injustice.

”

ANCHORING POLICIES AND POLICYMAKING PROCESSES IN REALITIES ON THE GROUND

Much of the drug policy landscape has changed in the past decade. **Drug-related decriminalisation** – with all its different shapes and sizes – can now be found in around 30 countries. Legal regulation schemes are mushrooming and spreading even to areas where the drug war was fought so violently that even minor reform appeared unthinkable.

Support for harm reduction is also increasing, albeit with significant challenges in its practice, as an **increasing number of countries** embrace it in policy documents and implementation.

The role of people-powered initiatives in creating the conditions to precipitate these changes cannot be overstated.

Leveraging people power to engage with key stakeholders in power-holding institutions, campaigners took this year's Support. Don't Punish Global Day of Action as an opportunity to engage with various policymaking and public actors, whose backgrounds, lines of work and duties may be different but interconnected and linked with drug policy.

In **Kribi (Cameroon)**, the *Association Camerounaise pour la Réduction des Risques* (ACRDR) organised a conference involving representatives from various ministries (from health to youth to education), faith-based leaders, and law enforcement agencies. The conference focussed on the living conditions and the human rights of people who use drugs. In **Montserrado (Liberia)**, activists held a workshop series on harm reduction together with the Ministry of Health, after which participants formed a coalition to advance harm reduction in the country.



ACRDR colleagues and representatives from the Ministry of Health pose for a Support. Don't Punish photo in Yaoundé. Photo: ACRDR

Meanwhile, in **Akure (Nigeria)**, campaigners from Students for Sensible Drug Policy (SSDP) and allied organisations mobilised under the banner 'Rethinking Drug Policy', educating other civil society organisations, Nigeria's drugs agency (NDLEA), and the public on the goals of Support. Don't Punish; and leveraging auspicious moves toward reform by the state's governor. In so doing, some activists proudly identified as people who use drugs, demanding better conditions for themselves and their communities.

In **Kishinev (Moldova)**, PULS Comunitar and partners presented a manifesto at the Ministry of Justice, titled 'Criminalisation doesn't work', and took part in a parliament-led working group to reform legislation and improve services for people who use drugs. The initiative gathered **public support** from a member of

Parliament and made it to a television programme.

Thousands of kilometres away, the Bengal Forum of People who Use Drugs (BFPUD) conducted a series of multi-level advocacy meetings, dialogue, and gatherings in **Kolkata (India)**. Advocating for the rights of and harm reduction for people who use drugs, the series linked BFPUD and its affiliated network members in West Bengal with local



Skoun's social media campaign prompted reflection on the human and financial cost of punitive approaches. Photo: SKOUN

authorities, criminal legal actors, the Health Department, and the Human Rights Commission Department in West Bengal.

In **Beirut, Baalbeck, and Tripoli (Lebanon)**, campaigners from Skoun, MENAHRA, SIDC, Legal Agenda, and AJEM reached over 500

people (and 30,000 online) by combining digital outreach, street-based actions engaging the public, and direct advocacy with Lebanon's newly elected parliament. The latter took form in a joint statement by a group of Lebanese nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), demanding the parliament to prioritise drug policy reform as a way to alleviate the overlapping crises facing the people of Lebanon.

Back on the vibrant African continent, young people who use drugs and allies working with Teens Link Uganda mobilised for a community-led demonstration at the **Wakiso (Uganda)** district headquarters. Participants wore Support. Don't Punish t-shirts and brought banners stating that 'the harms caused by the war on drugs can no longer be ignored', referring to the dire situation in which people who use drugs live in due to stigma, poor health and social support, and human rights violations.

In addition to attracting the attention of policymakers, law enforcement and media agencies, the initiative resulted in a number of concrete outcomes, namely the inclusion of people who use drugs in the forthcoming Global Fund NFM4 application, the establishment of a methadone treatment centre in eastern Uganda under PEPFAR COP22, as well as the formation of drug policy advocacy links between people who use drugs and Ugandan policymaking institutions.

These examples show only some of the many ways in which 'policymakers' rely on people and communities to carry out their work. Using a myriad of approaches, activists are united in their purpose: bringing pow-



Campaigners from Teens Link Uganda pose for a Day of Action group photo. Photo: Teens Link Uganda

er-holding institutions and decision-makers closer to realities on the ground.

Like any war, the ‘war on drugs’ is sustained through policies, laws, norms, and institutions tasked to uphold it, even if it means using violence.

Characterised by drug-related arrests, extortion, and abuse of various kinds, the police and other law enforcement agencies are highly visible examples of such institutions, causing harms and violating the human rights of our communities.

Challenging this, some campaigners decided to incorporate engagement with police officers in this year’s activities, highlighting how harmful their drug-related law enforce-

ment practices have been for people who use drugs as well as the wider society.

In **Kisumu, Kwale, and Nairobi (Kenya)**, the Western Kenya Sex Workers Alliance (WEKESWA) collaborated with the Kwale Network of People Using Drugs (KWANPUD),



A hybrid panel on the gendered impacts of the ‘war on drugs’ and interactions with sex workers justice. Photo: Western Kenya Sex Workers Alliance (WEKESWA)

Women Nest, and Renaissance, holding a space for honest discussions between people who use drugs, Kenya's drugs agency, and law enforcement officers.

In **Abeokuta (Nigeria)**, activists from SSDP gathered with more than 60 people who use drugs to raise awareness of the failures of the war on drugs, particularly related to discrimination, barriers to harm reduction, and unwarranted arrests of people who use drugs. Civil society organisations, medical workers, and law enforcement actors were invited to engage directly with local communities. The initiative then resulted in the establishment of a communication channel for people who use drugs to report discriminato-

ry acts from either medical personnel or law enforcement agencies.

Similar activities took place in **Bamako (Mali), Berhampore (India), Maputo (Mozambique)**, and across ten cities (Abomey-Calavi, Cotonou, Porto-Novo, Lokossa, Covè, Bohicon, Savalou, Natitingou, Gogounou et Parakou) in **Benin**. In the latter, a coalition of organisations made use of this year's Global Day of Action to start conversations about human rights with police officers, establishing a framework of consultation between law enforcement and local NGOs. Addressing the high prevalence of police brutality and

Continues on page 12 →



*'Support. Don't Punish – They also have rights; let's respect them!' - Sample drawing from illustration contest.
Photo: SDP Consortium Benin*



Photo: SSDP UniCal

VOICES ON THE STREET: ENGAGING PEOPLE WHO USE DRUGS IN COMMUNITY-BASED HARM REDUCTION SERVICES

2022 Global Day of Action in Nigeria
Small grants programme highlight

Like everyone else, people who use drugs come from diverse backgrounds, live highly variant lives, and have different needs. But just like everyone else, people who use drugs deserve access to health, social, and other forms of support to live flourishing lives. Surely, this includes access to harm reduction – in particular harm reduction programmes that put communities at the centre.

With that in mind, activists from Students for Sensible Drug Policy of the University of Calabar (Nigeria) dedicated this year's Global Day of Action to organising a *Town hall forum*

at Calabar's Bayside community. Drug use is highly prevalent in this community, including amongst young people as well as people in difficult socioeconomic situations.

The town hall forum consisted of awareness-raising sessions and panel discussions on community-based harm reduction, involving experts and representatives working on community advocacy, clinical psychiatry, drug treatment, and youth engagement. Around 30 people who use drugs were present and actively took part in the event. To enable open interactions, organisers hired in-

terpreters to facilitate speakers of local languages (Pidgin and Efik).

The event provided a safe space for people who use drugs to share their views on existing and/or past health interventions, identifying valuable lessons which healthcare professionals could learn about community-based harm reduction, and how they could further support its practice. In this regard, the group talked about the types of care that work, particularly those that are free of judgment and stigma, those that actively support active youth and community engagement, as well as those that go beyond the traditional clinical intervention.



Photo: SSDP UniCal

Core to this has been the need to enhance community ownership and effort in the context of harm reduction. As explained by Imo Uchenna of SSDP UniCal:

'Community harm reduction services will be more effective when the community owns the process... So, it's kind of different from the traditional way of accessing healthcare in hospitals... When they [the healthcare professionals] understand that this is a community effort, and when we let the community own the process, we get more commitment, we get more people who use drugs coming for the services... The mobilisation of people who use drugs, and leaders in these communities, is important, so they can engage other people who use drugs... We also talked about how the

services need to be brought to the community, so it's not just people who use drugs who have to come to the services.'

“

Services need to be brought to the community, so it's not just people who use drugs who have to come to the services.

”

Imo Uchenna, SSDP UniCal

All of this is not an easy task, as each context requires a set of approaches tailored to local and ever-changing needs. Moreover, communities who use drugs, activists, and harm reduction workers are also facing the challenge of criminalisation and risks of arrest, whilst mistrust between people who use drugs and law enforcement agency prevails.

Years prior, Uchenna and other organisers at SSDP UniCal primarily focussed on drug policy advocacy, communicating with law enforcement and other relevant stakeholders to press for reform. However, as SSDP UniCal became more engaged in campaigns like Support. Don't Punish, they began to dedicate more attention to harm reduction, connecting people who use drugs with health and harm reduction workers, supporting them 'to keep themselves safe until we have more supportive policies.'

After all, investing in community harm reduction equals investing in sustainable infrastructures, and creating harm reduction that is 'carried out in the community, and spearheaded by the community members,' asserted Uchenna.

ANCHORING POLICIES AND POLICYMAKING PROCESSES IN REALITIES ON THE GROUND

(CONTINUED)

Some campaigners also mobilised for the sake of improving public services, in particular harm reduction and health education regarding drug use. In **Maseru (Lesotho)**, SHELTER and She Hive collaborated with Lesotho's drugs agency as well as the Ministry of Gender and Ministry of Social Development to push for evidence-based programmes for people who use drugs, such as OAT, NSP, and naloxone distribution.

In **Port Louis (Mauritius)**, PILS's campaign pushed for better and stigma-free access to harm reduction, specifically OAT, for people who use drugs. Organisers created a video and a policy brief highlighting the barriers to accessing OAT. Besides limited support and distribution hours, OAT dispensation is located

in police premises, where people who use drugs often face discrimination and arrests.

Following the activity, PILS secured a meeting with the Ministry of Health and the advisor at the Prime Minister's office, continuing their advocacy to resolve the dysfunctions within Mauritius' OAT programme.

Furthermore, motivated by similar goals, activists from AksionPlus held focus groups in nine methadone therapy centres in eight **Albanian cities (Tiranë, Shkodër, Durrës, Elbasan, Fier, Vlorë, Korçë and Sarandë)**, documenting the needs of people who use drugs and their family members with regard to opioid agonist therapy in particular, and harm reduction in general.

Situations of injustice exacerbate cycles of individual and collective trauma. Pain, anger, sadness, and fear – all these emotions once again came up and were shared and processed during this year's Global Day of Action. But such emotions have not prevented people from mobilising for the future. If anything, our shared indignation has contributed to our resolve, even when it is hard to see the light at the end of the tunnel.

Many campaigners around the world know that each death linked to punitive drug policies could have been prevented. And, while acknowledging this can be a source perseverance, it does not make the process of grappling with loss and tragedy any simpler. This is why, just like in previous years, the 2022 Global Day of Action served as an opportunity for communities to not only grieve and heal together, but also to organise and fight for a better tomorrow. In so doing, communities worked together to solidify people

SUPPORT. DON'T PUNISH.

RECOMMENDATION #1

La distribution de **méthadone** doit se faire hors des locaux de la police afin de lutter contre la **stigmatisation** et les préjugés dont sont victimes les patient.e.s traité.e.s à la méthadone, qualifié.e.s de criminel.le.s.



'The distribution of methadone must take place somewhere else than police premises in order to fight against the stigmatisation and prejudice suffered by patients treated with methadone who are deemed as criminals'. Facebook post by PILS, Mauritius

SOLIDIFYING PEOPLE POWER: DIVERSE, GENERATIVE, AND INTERCONNECTED

power – a type of power that is diverse, generative, and interconnected.

In **Kisumu (Kenya)**, campaigners from KinPUD and Picture Youth Group gathered for the tenth year anniversary of the SDP Global Day of Action, to remember countless vic-

“
If anything, our shared indignation has contributed to our resolve, even when it is hard to see the light at the end of the tunnel.”

tims of the war on drugs, those who died from overdose, torture, extra-judicial killings, HIV, and other preventable tragedies. Participants lit candles and held a moment of silence, then sang a song together. In addition to this commemoration, a street campaign and forum were also organised, along with a space for refreshments.

Similarly in **Quezon City (the Philippines)**, activists from Sensible Philippines lit candles whilst sharing stories related to the drug war, combining it with a bike ride and shirt printing.



*Memorial service for peers pushed into premature death.
Photo: Initiative group Soprichastnost*

In **Kaliningrad (Russia)**, community-led group ‘Soprichastnost’ held a memorial event for those who passed away due to overdoses, whereas in **Sydney (Australia)**, local faith-based organisations coordinated an inter-faith prayer service to promote justice and health support for people who use drugs.

After a moment of remembrance, activists in **Edmonton (Canada)** shared an art and writing space where participants could pour their hearts and minds into, whilst enjoying meals and snacks together.

In **Rijeka (Croatia)**, campaigners opted for a more playful and dynamic approach to initiating collective discussions about alternatives to the ‘war on drugs’, organising sports games, a dance event, and a quiz on drugs and harm reduction. In addition to the above, community gatherings were organised in dozens of cities worldwide, including in **Tashkent (Uzbekistan)**, **Abidjan (Cote d’Ivoire)**, and **Maseru (Lesotho)**.

Always in the spirit of solidifying people power, 2022 saw a growing number of cross-sector, cross-movement, and intersectional efforts to counter the ‘war on drugs’, which operates alongside other systems of oppression and exploitation. Importantly, women

and non-binary people have been taking a leading role in this arduous journey.

In **Recife (Brazil)**, the Free School of Harm Reduction held a debate with women and others involved in popular feminist movements. Central to their discussion was the assurance that ending the ‘war on drugs’ is undoubtedly a feminist issue. In the discussion, activists critically unpacked how racism, misogyny, and classism dominated Brazil’s criminal and security systems, incarcerating poor people, Black women, and many more for drug-related charges – depriving them of basic human rights and dignity.



Activists in Jakarta (Indonesia) took to the streets to engage with the public about drug policy, emphasising on their disproportionate impacts on women.

Photo: NAPUD

Another inspiring feminist activity took place in Mexico, regionally led by the Women’s Collective against the War on Drugs (*Colectiva de Mujeres en Contra de la Guerra de las Drogas*), consisting of representatives from several community-based organisations in **Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, and the United States**. The coalition carried out a digital campaign titled ‘Prohibition Harms Women’ (aligned with the global campaign coordinated by the Women and Harm Reduction International

Network - WHRIN), and through a WhatsApp group, conducted discussions to enhance the visibility and participation of women and non-binary people who use drugs in harm reduction and drug policy.

Powerful actions also shook **Montevideo (Uruguay)**, where the Latin American Articulation of Antiprohibitionist Feminists (*Articulación Latinoamericana de Feministas Antiprohibicionistas*), Imaginario 9, Mizangas movement of Afro women and RENFA held workshops and meetings to address the multiple horrific ways in which the war on drugs harms poor people, women of African descent, Indigenous women, migrants, homeless people, and refugees. Instead of criminalisation and coercive approaches like forced treatment, campaigners called for hu-

man rights and harm reduction approaches that centre collective care.

Organisers from ReverdeSer Colectivo and allies in **Mexico City** joined the local Pride march, distributing *pleasure management kits* with affirming messages of human rights, youth and care, and sexual diversity. Similarly, in **Warsaw (Poland)** activists attended the local Pride Parade, engaging fellow attendees on the realities of punitive drug policy, in addition to taking part in a **live debate** on criminalisation and its intersection with socioeconomic exclusion.

In countering the ‘war on drugs’ and the many oppressive systems that intersect it, solidifying people power also means transforming the way power is understood and distributed. Genuine people power is not concentrated in the hands of the few, but it is shared amongst many. This goal of redistributing and sharing



Support. Don't Punish campaigners join Pride events in Mexico City and Warsaw.
Photos by: ReverdeSer Colectivo (left), Polish Drug Policy Network (right)

power surely materialised in campaigners' efforts to strengthen, connect, and build the collective capacity of communities.

In **San José (Costa Rica)**, for instance, three community-led and harm reduction organisations – ACEID, LANPUD, and FECORED – provided psychosocial assistance and welfare support for more than 200 peers without shelter and in situations of vulnerability. This was an opportunity to cultivate solidarity between people who use drugs and gesture to the transformative potential of community-led support. Two days later, the same campaigners carried out political advocacy involving public health institutions and civil society organisations working on HIV advocacy in order to fight stigma and discrimination.

Through their 'Random Acts of Kindness' campaign in **Bogor (Indonesia)**, activists from Womxn's Voice showed that solidarity can be built from the very personal, including reaching out to strangers. To do so, campaigners gathered at a public garden to start conversations with pas-

sers-by about the impacts of the drug war on women and non-binary people. Each person was then offered the chance to express their support using a heart-shaped sticker and campaigners managed to gather more than 80 of them! Time and time again, campaigners' experiences show that empathy and compassion flourish when given the chance.

In addition, increasingly visible this year is the role of storytelling and gatherings to advance epistemic justice by asserting, for instance, that people's lived experiences are valid sources of knowledge and expertise, and should be of guidance to policymaking.

No longer should people's lived experiences and ideas be dismissed, taken for granted, or reduced to mere statistics used to fuel coercive and punitive policies. The effort to make community struggles more visible has been an important part of this progressive shift too. For example, the Mozambique's Network of People who Use Drugs (MozPUD) organised a march in the centre of **Maputo (Mozambique)**, where people who use drugs were able to visibly campaign for their rights for the very first time in the country. Across West Africa, campaigners from SSDP International organised focus group discussions centring the experiences and demands of young people, promoting greater youth participation in civil society and policymaking efforts.

Reaching multiple cities in Greece, PRAKSIS created a video campaign titled 'We tell a story', featuring a person who faced imprisonment and other forms of suffering due to the Greek criminal legal system. Simply telling this story – and having around 200 people listen it – helped give this person strength to



'The most important thing when things are going badly is not to stay locked up, but to seek help.' AILES in Mangalkhan, Mauritius created a series of videos following a workshop on gender-sensitive harm reduction programmes and support for women who use drugs. Photo: AILES

move forward, whilst prompting encouraging responses from his peers.

In **Kaunas and Atylus (Lithuania)**, local activists reached nearly 6,000 people with an on-line event where people talked about how the criminalisation of drug use impacted them personally.

Safe spaces are important to exchange experiences and develop marginalised communities' capacity to mobilise and advocate for themselves. This is perhaps why we witness more and more activities focusing on the gendered, racist, and classist dynamics

of the 'war on drugs', centring women and non-binary people, LGBTQ+ communities, workers, migrants, and more.

This year, such safe spaces were created in **Pakistan, South Africa, and Canada**, where women and non-binary people gathered to share their personal experiences with drug prohibition, reflecting on what prohibition under patriarchy means to them. **Similar activities** were also organised in **Ukraine, Mexico, Burundi, India, and Portugal**, with support from WHRIN.



This 'drug pedagogy' event in Ibagué (Colombia) created space for participatory storytelling about local experiences with psychoactive substances, including exchanges about self-care for people who smoke substances, as well as ancestral uses of coca. Young people and children actively participated along with older members of the community. The mural reads: 'You can change your leaves, but not your roots'. Photo: Corporación Dadactica



Group photo from the 'kumustahan' event. Photo: IDUCARE / StreetLawPH

CARING CONVERSATIONS: KUMUSTAHAN IN CEBU AND CALOOCAN

2022 Global Day of Action in the Philippines
Small grants programme highlight

The 'war on drugs' in the Philippines has taken and ruined the lives of dozens of thousands of people. Not few of those victimised by punitive policies and practices are women, who have either been killed, jailed, or harmed in various ways due to their drug use and/or involvement in the drug market.

Against this backdrop, both StreetLawPH and IDUCare have long been actively supporting local communities who use drugs to collectivise, fight criminalisation, and access health, social, and legal support. In recent

years, they have been increasingly inspired by other advocates in Southeast Asian countries to collaborate with networks of women who use drugs, which has brought them to this year's creative engagement with the Support. Don't Punish Global Day of Action.

Titled *kumustahan* ('kumusta' meaning 'how are you doing?'), StreetLawPH and IDUCare convened two groups of women who use drugs from two cities, Cebu and Caloocan – with whom the two organisations have collaborated in the last few years.

Panki Nadela of IDU Care added that whilst the group of women in Cebu are more focussed on harm reduction approaches, the Caloocan-based group is leaning more towards abstinence-based approaches. The latter is also more isolated and less exposed to other organisations and communities. Part of this is due to the fact that 'Caloocan has been so violently hit by the drug war,' said Panki.

'These women [in Caloocan] are graduates of a community-based programme of the city government, which was an intervention to prevent them from getting arrested, jailed, or it's a way for them to be released from jail. And it was also a way to ensure they didn't become part of the kill list. They're really survivors of the drug war... We are not forcing them to immediately accept [alternative approaches like harm reduction], because of their experiences with the "war on drugs", which was very violent and negative... We cannot blame them... as they are also afraid of the consequences if they're found to be using drugs again. So, there's a lot of navigating...' shared Mary Catherine Alvarez, from StreetLaw PH.

Given these realities, the intention of StreetLawPH and IDUCare's action was to provide a safe space for these two groups of women to get to know each other, exchange stories, and talk about their hopes and dreams amidst the seemingly insurmountable challenges brought about by the 'war on drugs' and other oppressive policies in the Philippines. And indeed, despite their differences, the participants managed to have fruitful discussions. Both groups are equally committed to improving the lives and livelihoods of their respective communities.

As a relatively new organisation, the Caloocan-based group is inspired by their counterparts in Cebu to work towards expanding their network and supporting other survivors of the drug war. Meanwhile, StreetLawPH

“

These women [in Caloocan] are graduates of a community-based programme of the city government (...). It was a way to ensure they didn't become part of the kill list. They're really survivors of the drug war.

Mary Catherine Alvarez, StreetLawPH

”

and IDUCare are still planning follow-up activities that would further bridge the two groups, whilst promoting nuanced perspectives around drugs and drug use.

Knowing how difficult this process is, Alvarez noted, 'they're at the point of being able to identify the harms of the war on drugs, such as talking about the harrowing experiences of being in contact with the criminal justice system or with the police. We are still on the way to discussing alternatives...'

As a new congress is taking shape in the Philippines, both Nadela and Alvarez remain hopeful that the 'war on drugs' will end. But for now, they are concerned about the safety of local communities that they work with, as illustrated by Alvarez, 'to be honest, we are a bit envious that in other countries, communities can actually take a leading role on activities like Support. Don't Punish. It is hard to do it in the Philippines. Perhaps for the 15th anniversary of SDP this would no longer be a problem for us.'

CHALLENGING CRIMINALISATION AT ITS CORE

Nearly every year, the World Drug Report highlights an increase in drug use, production, and distribution. Not so often acknowledged in such reports has been the role of prohibitionist drug policy in causing drug-related harms, and more importantly, the failure of these punitive policies to prevent drug use and drug related harms.

Many campaigners know that criminalisation is a highly counterproductive response to the challenges that their communities experience. Drugs are part of our human society, and most campaigners continue to take a pragmatic and harm-reduction-oriented approach to this reality, saving lives along the way.

Since its inception, the Support. Don't Punish campaign has always focussed on strategic, active, and participatory media and public

engagement to challenge and offer sustainable alternatives to criminalisation. This line of work has contributed to a shifting discourse in relation to drugs and the ways we relate to them, mainstreaming the demand and hope for drug policy that promotes, rather than undermine, our shared need for care and connection.

This year, organisers in the African continent continue to take a leading role in collaborating with various types of media. In **Bujumbura (Burundi)**, Village Health Action and partners used media leverage to talk about the failures of criminalisation and advocate for better health services for people who use drugs, after which a prestigious media platform published their story, attracting interests from high-level policymakers to listen to their message, whilst local communities became more inclined to reach out for support. At the same time, campaigners carried out media broadcasts in **Kaduna (Nigeria)**, reaching over 1000 people.

In **Freetown (Sierra Leone)**, campaigners from the Institute for Drug Control and Human Security and SSDP Sierra Leone organised a jogging session whilst calling for the adoption of Sierra Leone's new drug law. Attended by people who use drugs, students, as well as representatives from the country's drug and law enforcement efforts, the event was widely covered by the media, resulting in publication in three television stations, three radio stations, and two newspapers.

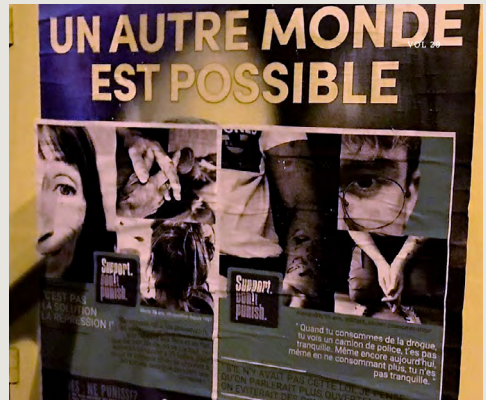
Similarly calling for alternatives to criminalisation and imprisonment, campaigners from VOCAL Kenya took part in radio talk shows and other media engagement in three **Kenyan cities (Nairobi, Kisumu, and Malindi)**,



Campaigners in Bosnia Herzegovina distributed Support. Don't Punish leaflets in the city of Tuzla, and organised movie screenings and talks on harm reduction.
Photo: Asocijacija Margina

in addition to other actions such as communicating with public institutions, publishing policy briefs, holding community meetings, and distributing SDP campaign gear.

Following a roundtable with key stakeholders (from the council for human rights to health practitioners and NGOs), courageous campaigners in Ukraine talked to local media agencies about the situation of people who use drugs in prisons and other closed settings – reaching an estimated total of 100,000 viewers. This action coincided with allied campaigners' mobilisation across multiple cities in **Ukraine**. Undeterred by precariousness triggered by the war, they organised flash-mobs titled 'Fighting for my rights', presenting illustrations to highlight the experiences of people who use drugs in times of war.



Another world is possible': Campaigners from AIDES held gatherings in several French cities, presenting collages, photos, and testimonials of people who use drugs, showcasing the life-affirming quality of harm reduction and drug policy based on care and compassion.

Photo: AIDES

Continues on page 24



*Harm reduction tent organised by the project Échele Cabeza.
Photo: Acción Técnica Social*

LEVERAGING MEDIA TO ADVANCE REFORM WITH A SOCIAL JUSTICE LENS

2022 Global Day of Action in Colombia
Initiatives Programme highlight

Acción Técnica Social (ATS) is a civil society organisation headquartered in Bogotá (Colombia), whose drug policy work ranges from research and harm reduction interventions to policy and media advocacy. In advancing these fronts, ATS collaborates with organisations and communities inside and outside Colombia.

With the Support. Don't Punish campaign, ATS has been fearlessly innovative. Over the past few years, for instance, in response to deep-

ening socioeconomic inequalities among people who use drugs, ATS' Global Day of Action activities have integrated peer-to-peer care components —offering health checks, grooming services, harm reduction education, and nutritious food to street-based people who use smokable cocaine.

This direct engagement with communities affected by criminalisation and neglect, whether in the streets, at universities, in nightlife settings or through social media, characterises

ATS' people-centred approach to reform. In the words of ATS' Vanessa Morris: 'the most gratifying aspect of our work is to see how people who use drugs are empowered to speak up for themselves, to stand up to authorities and demand change in failed strategies'.

“

The most gratifying aspect of our work is to see how people who use drugs are empowered to speak up for themselves.

Vanessa Morris, ATS

”

In ATS' experience, community empowerment and policy advocacy have been potentiated by their resourceful use of social networking, media engagement, and other creative skills to popularise discussions around drugs and social justice, through projects like **Échele Cabeza**, **Cambie**, **Coca Regulada**, **Zonas de rumba segura**, and **Festival de Cortos Psicoactivos**.

As Morris explained: *We have gone from being among the first organisations to publicly raise these topics, to becoming an indispensable reference for journalists in mass media and specialised outlets'.*

And this work is paying off in spades! Sustained engagement with traditional and social media has shifted the terms of the public debate in Colombia, from discussions on whether the 'war on drugs' has failed, to

concrete proposals for sustainable alternatives in its stead.

Indeed, with contributions from the Support. Don't Punish Initiatives Programme, ATS is accompanying over 5 national and local bills that seek to enshrine harm reduction in law. An important part of this work will focus on a public-facing campaign entitled 'La Reducción de Daños Será Ley' (*Harm reduction will be the law*), which includes social media campaigns, live sessions, debates, and parliamentary engagement.

In concluding, Morris leaves us with discerning words of advice: *'Just as the media have been largely responsible for maintaining prohibition, now they are the perfect forum to change it'.*



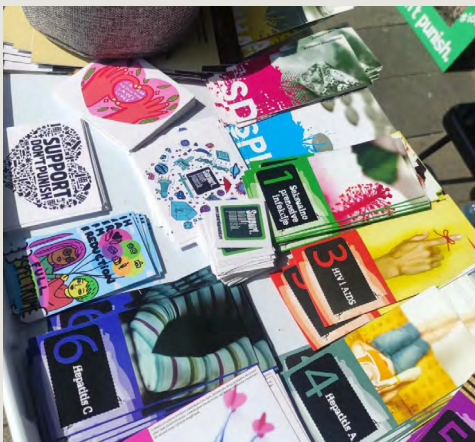
*Visual identity of ATS' Initiative Programme activity
'Harm reduction will be the law'*

CHALLENGING CRIMINALISATION AT ITS CORE

(CONTINUED)

Surely, the process of challenging criminalisation would not be complete without actions that practically put harm reduction at the forefront, emphasising its limitless possibility, fluidity, and diversity. These include various initiatives like drug checking, trainings and workshops for naloxone administration and related programmes, education, and information exchange on harm reduction techniques, and more.

For example, in **Morelia (México)**, several organisations held a workshop on drug checking, sharing scientific-experimental techniques necessary to identify the degree of purity of a substance. The workshop went smoothly with all the needed supplies, yet it was carried out with minimum publicity for security reasons. Another key purpose of the workshop was to equip those who cannot access public spaces like festivals, where drug checking services could mainly be found in the region.



Informative leaflets at a Support. Don't Punish stand in Podgorica, Montenegro. Photo: Montenegrin harm reduction network LINK and NGO Juventas

In **Sydney and Melbourne (Australia)**, around 1000 participants attended an event organised by Drug Policy Australia, where organisers screened movies, held discussions, and carried out demonstrations of naloxone use for overdose reversal. In addition to publications and merchandise, fentanyl testing strips and reagent drug testing kits were also made available at the venue. Meanwhile in **Perth**, activists from Peer Based Harm Reduction WA distributed 100 harm reduction care packs to people who use drugs, including a rain poncho, disposable tourniquet, sterile water, and snacks.

For many campaigners, harm reduction goes beyond specific interventions, like the distribution of hygienic paraphernalia or access to naloxone. Harm reduction also serves as a philosophy and approach of care that counters the injustice of marginalising and disempowering systems and institutions that create obstacles to self and collective care. With that in mind, activists from Elementa in **Bogota (Colombia)** dedicated their time and energy to people deprived of liberty, organising informative workshops to help people in prison access care, harm reduction services and legal support.

Another concrete expression of harm reduction is the facilitation of access to education and information on drug, acknowledging the importance of people making informed decisions about their bodies and lives. Through such efforts, numerous campaigners also discuss the long history and societal benefits of psychoactive substances.



*UISCE organised a naloxone training session for staff and peers from the Conclakin area, Dublin, Ireland.
Photo: Clondalkin Tus Nua*

Advocates in **Montpellier (France)**, for instance, organised an educational event to discuss traditional and contemporary uses of psychedelic substances for healing.

Similarly, inspired by the deep relationships that humans have with drugs, activists organised around the 5th Support. Don't Punish Festival in Mexico created their second edition of a fanzine on pleasure and risk management. The fanzine was made distributed free-of-charge in **Tijuana, Querétaro, and Mexico City**, alongside many other activities, including music festivals, talks, workshops, analysis of psychoactive substances, delivery of hygienic and safe paraphernalia for

the use of cannabis, smokeable stimulants and sniffable substances such as cocaine, as well as HIV tests.



E de Lei distributed water and harm reduction supplies for 100 people (many of whom have no shelter) in Sao Paulo, Brazil. Photos: E de Lei



The mobile drug checking van attracted dozens of people eager to test this harm reduction facility.

Photo: Kosmicare

DRUG CHECKING FOR THE PEOPLE

2022 Global Day of Action in Portugal

Small grants programme highlight

For the first time in history, on 26th June 2022, residents of **Porto (Portugal)** were able to test their substances – thanks to the mobile drug checking promoted by Kosmicare, in an initiative of the R3 Harm Reduction Network, in collaboration with APDES, ARRIMO, CASO, Médicos do Mundo, SAOM, and Norte Vida.

The drug checking van travelled to four districts of Porto: Aleixo, Pinheiro Torres, Cerco, and Zona Histórica. Nineteen samples were analysed, and a peer assembly was held with around 15 people who use drugs, though dozens more were present throughout the day. The

event also involved local harm reduction teams and was covered by a local newspaper.

The moment the van arrived in Porto, people were already waiting in line. As recalled by Kosmicare organiser Inês Pedro Nobre Diniz, ‘people were excited to see us, saying, “we’ve been waiting for you to test [our substances]. We never did this in Porto before.”’

For years, Portugal has been known for its ground-breaking decriminalisation policy and its success in significantly curbing drug-related harms as well as in supporting public health as a whole. But people who use drugs

“

The moment the drug checking van arrived in Porto, people were already waiting in line.

”

continue to face stigma, harassment, coercion, and social exclusion. They also remain vulnerable to health and other risks associated with the unregulated drug markets, for example through drug contamination. In fact, the availability of drug checking (and other lifesaving programmes like drug consumption rooms) in Portugal is very limited. Only Lisbon has regular drug checking services, operated by Kosmicare with limited funding.

But compared to the capital, cities like Porto have even fewer resources to provide drug checking services. Local authorities are also less inclined to listen to people who use drugs, who, despite the stigma they face, are still actively engaged in harm reduction and policy advocacy, as well as in sparking social change. Surely, this is largely thanks to the work of peer networks like CASO, who play an integral role in designing and promoting lifesaving programmes in a participatory manner.

‘Sometimes people think that people who use drugs don’t care about their health. And this stigma is even stronger towards people in more vulnerable conditions. But we have all these people who are very interested in this [drug checking] work, and asking questions about when the next time they could come,’ explained Diniz as she described how eager people were to engage with the mobile drug checking initiative.

At the peer assembly coordinated by organisers, local people who use drugs shared their core needs when it comes to drug checking. Ideally, both fixed and mobile services should be available, and more investment should be made to enhance technological capacities of the services. Local peers also demand quicker results, and the opportunity to have their substances returned to them, as opposed to being destroyed. Certainly, drug checking services should operate alongside other harm reduction programmes.

Despite the overwhelming success of the event, Diniz and her colleagues remain wary of the future of drug checking in Portugal: ‘Portugal has lots of experience with harm reduction, but some – not all – policymakers still have a drug-war – or a drug prohibitionist – mindset. They know drug checking and harm reduction are important, but [essentially] they still want to stop drug use. This is why there’s still stigma around this service.’

Notwithstanding these challenges, Kosmicare and other local organisations remain committed to the work they are doing for local communities. In this regard, Diniz acknowledges the role of Support. Don’t Punish as an annual opportunity ‘to reflect what we need to do this year, what people need this year.’

“

Sometimes people think that people who use drugs don’t care about their health. But we have all these people asking when’s the next time they could come [check their substances].

Inês Diniz, Kosmicare

”



Photo sent by: Sahara Aalhad, India



Photos by: CSAPA Kaz'oté, Reunion Island



Photo sent by: SSDP Ghana



Photo sent by: IDCHS Sierra Leone



Photo sent by: Spiritek, France



Photo sent by: Streetworks, Canada



Photo sent by: Free School of Harm Reduction, Brazil



Photo sent by: Finnish Association for Humane Drug Policy (HPP)



Photo sent by: BRIDGE, Afghanistan



Photo sent by: SDP Consortium Benin



Photo sent by: VOLNA, Ukraine

BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

As asserted by many campaigners this year, the Support. Don't Punish Global Day of Action remains an invigorating high point in the harm reduction calendar, offering a counterpoint to the outdated annual commemoration of the status quo. Indeed, the immense scale and variety of this year's activities shows how Support. Don't Punish has become an iconic and meaningful symbol of our global struggle against criminalisation and repression – in favour of care and community.

As always, harm reduction related action and advocacy makes up a huge part of this year's activities. United against the 'war on drugs', campaigners continue to champion harm reduction as an essential component of drug policy, even if each community has different views of how it should look like in their own contexts. Moreover, these hundreds of experiences prioritising bottom-up advocacy and community empowerment speak volumes of our vision for the future: one where drug policy puts people at the centre.

Furthermore, this year's Global Day of Action reminds us that the Support. Don't Punish campaign is also a learning community. This year we have witnessed even more cross-movement and intersectional actions inspired by feminist, queer, and anti-racist activism. As we celebrate these powerful connections, we also reflect on how to extend our networks of solidarity and support to rural communities and people involved in the cultivation of crops deemed illicit, whose lives and health are also imperilled by the punitive edifice of the 'war on drugs'.

Ten years on from the campaign's first steps, the 2022 Global Day of Action illustrates how increasingly powerful we have all become – together – as a transnational collective united in struggle for a bright and caring future beyond the 'war on drugs'.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A DECENTRALISED EFFORT

The campaign's modus operandi

The Support. Don't Punish is an international decentralised networked effort, contributed to by thousands of campaigners and hundreds of **local partner organisations** worldwide.

The **International Drug Policy Consortium** hosts the Support. Don't Punish campaign and acts as its main hub. As such, IDPC leads on global fundraising, capacity development and communication efforts, and provides material and in-kind support to campaigners across the globe.

THE CAMPAIGN'S SISTER HUBS

Championing our common cause worldwide

IDPC is in regular dialogue with organisations that actively promote the campaign and contribute to the mobilisation of grassroots groups, including through their own fundraising efforts.

These **sister hubs** often have a regional or thematic focus. Their commitment has been crucial for the campaign's growth and many of the activities that have been mentioned above owe themselves to their unwavering dedication.

For this reason, an account of the 2021 Support. Don't Punish Global Day of Action would not be complete without acknowledging the fantastic work of sister hubs such as: the **Drug Policy Network South East Europe (DPNSEE)**, the **Eurasian Harm Reduction Association (EHRA)**, the Eurasian Network of

People Who Use Drugs (ENPUD), the **European Network of People who Use Drugs (EuroNPUD)**, the **Middle East and North Africa Harm Reduction Association (MENAHR)**, the **Women and Harm Reduction International Network (WHRIN)** and **YouthRISE**.

CAMPAIGN DONORS

Resourcing people power for harm reduction

Last, but by no means least, IDPC is incredibly grateful to the campaign's donors, who provide absolutely essential means for campaigners to challenge criminalisation and promote harm reduction.

IDPC has received dedicated campaign funds from the **Elton John AIDS Foundation** and the **Robert Carr Fund**. Important core support has also been received from the **Open Society Foundations**.

