7 January 2005

The Secretary of the Expert Committee on the Selection and Use of Essential Medicines
Policy, Access and Rational Use
Essential Drugs and Medicines Policy
World Health Organization
20 Avenue Appia
CH-1211 Geneva 27
Switzerland
Email Hogerzeilh@who.int

Re: A recommendation to include methadone and buprenorphine in the WHO Model List of Essential Medicines

Dear Committee,

According to the WHO Expert Committee on the Use of Essential Drugs (1), 1999, drugs on the Essential Medicines List should:

- satisfy the health care needs of the majority of the population with a specific condition
- be available at all times
- be available in adequate amounts and in the appropriate dosage forms; and
- be available at a price that individuals and the community can afford.

We believe that methadone and buprenorphine satisfy these criteria and should be reviewed in regard to the considerable benefit they provide both to patients undergoing treatment for opioid dependence (2, 3, 4, 5) as well as the population at large, especially regarding the value they add relative to their cost (6).

We the undersigned - representing people living with HIV and their advocates, HIV prevention workers, drug users, treatment and harm reduction professionals and addiction scientists - request the World Health Organization to include methadone and buprenorphine treatment for opioid dependence in the WHO Model List of Essential Medicines and set out our reasons below.

1 The global importance of injecting drug users in control of HIV.

It is estimated (7) that 5-10% of all HIV infections in the world today are directly attributable to the sharing of injection equipment among injecting drug users while additional HIV infections are attributable (8) to spread from drug users to their heterosexual and homosexual partners. In many parts of the world, injecting drug users comprise a substantial proportion of new HIV infections (9), for example 72% of new HIV infections in Ukraine (10). This is particularly true in two critical regions: (i) central and eastern Europe (11) and (ii) Asia (12). HIV infection is spreading more rapidly than in any other part of the world in central and eastern Europe (13) where injecting drug users account (14) for over 80% of new HIV infections. Before the end of the decade, the epicentre of the HIV epidemic will shift to Asia (15), home to half the world's population. In most Asian countries, injecting drug users account for the overwhelming majority of new HIV infections (16) in a number of countries around the world, HIV infection spread (17) initially among injecting drug users and later developed into a generalised epidemic.

Reducing the number of new HIV infections in injecting drug users is important globally and critical in regions of the world which will determine the global course of the HIV epidemic over the next quarter century.
2 The importance of methadone and buprenorphine in achieving control of HIV among injecting drug users.

There is compelling evidence that methadone and buprenorphine treatment reduces the risk of HIV infection among injecting drug users. This evidence was summarised (18) in a (forthcoming) Cochrane review:

“A recent review of 28 studies, involving nearly 8000 participants evaluated the effects of oral substitution treatment on behaviours of drug users with a high risk for HIV transmission. Evidence showed that substitution treatment is associated with reductions in illicit opioid use, injecting use and sharing of injecting equipment. Users undergoing substitution treatment were also less likely to report multiple sexual partners, or to exchange sex for drugs or money. On the basis of these reductions in risk behaviours, it can be concluded that oral substitution treatment is associated with a reduced transmission of HIV among opioid drug users. Oral substitution treatment programmes for opioid users in countries with emergent or established HIV and drug use problems should be strongly supported.”

There is compelling evidence for the effectiveness (19), safety (20) and cost effectiveness (21) of substitution treatment. Apart from a reduction in HIV infection, other important benefits include substantial reductions in drug overdose deaths (22), crime (23) and heroin use (24) and also a considerable improvement in social functioning (25). Methadone and buprenorphine treatment has now been implemented in a growing number of countries, especially in western Europe (26). Yet global implementation remains poor, especially in central and eastern Europe and Asia. There are a number of barriers to increased implementation of methadone including competition for scarce health care resources in developing and transitional countries (though substitution treatment is relatively inexpensive and cost effective). Including methadone and buprenorphine in the WHO Model List of Essential Medicines will reduce the financial disincentive for countries struggling to pay for this treatment.

3 The importance of methadone and buprenorphine in achieving the target of three million people on antiretroviral treatment by 2005

WHO set a target (27) of providing three million people with antiretroviral treatment (ART) by 2005. Experience in many countries has demonstrated that it is very difficult to recruit and retain (28) large numbers of HIV infected heroin injectors without the ready availability of methadone and buprenorphine treatment. In the many countries in the world where heroin injectors comprise a substantial proportion of HIV infections, the failure to recruit and retain large numbers of HIV infected injecting drug users is a major obstacle to the 3x5 initiative. There is clear evidence that substitution treatment with buprenorphine and methadone play a crucial role in adherence provision and effective utilization of ART for injecting drug users living with HIV (29, 30).

On behalf of all supporting researchers, practitioners and activists enlisted in the Appendix,

CEE-HRN
Central and Eastern European Harm Reduction Network
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EATG
European AIDS Treatment Group
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IHRA
International Harm Reduction Association
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References:


Appendix

The following list provides names of organizations and individuals who expressed their support to this letter. Additional contact information available on request from info@ceehrn.org

International

International AIDS Society
International Society of Addiction Medicine
15th International Conference on AIDS - Leadership Forum on Injecting Drug Use
Health & Development Networks
International Community of Women Living with HIV/AIDS
The Global Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS (GNP+)
International Journal of Drug Policy

Africa

SCARJOV
Association for Reintegration of Youth/Children in Social Life
Luanda, Angola
*

FISS - MST/SIDA
Support to people infected and affected by AIDS and sexually transmissible infections
Yaounde, Cameroon
*

MULEIDE
(Women, Law and Development)
Maputo, Mozambique
*

AIDS & Rights Alliance for Southern Africa
Windhoek, Namibia
*

Horizons Program /
Population Council
Dakar, Senegal
*

Treatment Action Campaign
Muizenberg, South Africa
*

Faraja Trust Fund
Morogoro, Tanzania

Asia (without Central Asia)

Asian Harm Reduction Network
Chiang Mai, Thailand
*

CREA
Society for Community Health Rehabilitation Education and Awareness
Dhaka, Bangladesh
*

AIZHIXING - Institute of Health Education
Beijing, China
*

Solidarity and Action Against the HIV Infection in India
Chennai and Calcutta, India
Sharan
Society For Service to Urban Poverty
Delhi, India
*
North East India Harm Reduction Network
Imphal, Manipur, India
*
SPARSHA
Society for Positive Atmosphere and Related Support to HIV/AIDS
Kolkata, West Bengal, India
*
SASO
Social Awareness Service Organization
Manipur, India
*
Bali Plus Support Group Denpasar
Bali, Indonesia
*
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Executive Director of Pars Curative Researchers Institute for HIV/STI/DU
Directors of International Education and Research Collaboration of NRITLD
Kemanashah, Iran
NGO Persepolis
Tehran, Iran
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Malaysian AIDS Council
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
*
Malaysian Society for Infectious Diseases and Chemotherapy
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
*
Women and Health Association of Kuala Lumpur
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
*
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Independent Public Health Worker
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Nava Kiran Plus
Kathmandu, Nepal
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Methadone Programme, Mental Hospital
Lagankhel, Nepal
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Bright Community Welfare Organization
Tehsil Shabqader Distt
Charsadda NWFP Pakistan
*
Hamdam Development Organization
Dera Ismail Khan, Pakistan
*
Raza Hussnain
AMAL Human Development Network
Islamabad, Pakistan
*
DOST Foundation
Peshawar, Pakistan
*
NGO CAPS
Peshawar, Pakistan
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Prof M. Ismail
RISE (Rural Initiatives in Sustainability and Empowerment)
Peshawar, Pakistan
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Asia Pacific Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS
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Thai AIDS Treatment Action Group
Bangkok, Thailand
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Thai Drug Users' Network
Bangkok, Thailand
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Chiang Mai, Thailand
Australia

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People Living With HIV/AIDS ACT
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Sex Worker Outreach Project
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Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia

Aksion Plus
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Antidrugs Civil Union
Yerevan, Armenia
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Belarusian Civil Union "Positive Movement"
Minsk, Belarus
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Public Institute for Alcoholism and Substance Abuse of Canton Sarajevo
Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health and Social Development Foundation</td>
<td>Sofia, Bulgaria</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tomas Zabransky, M.D., Ph.D.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Visiting Professor in the Department of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine</td>
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<tr>
<td>Palacký University, Medical Faculty</td>
<td>Olomouc, Czech Republic</td>
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<tr>
<td>SANANIM Drug Services</td>
<td>Prague, Czech Republic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ante Ivancic, M.D., GP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Director, Centre for Outpatient Treatment of Drug Addiction</td>
<td>Poreč, Croatia</td>
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<tr>
<td>AIDS Information &amp; Support Center</td>
<td>Tallinn, Estonia</td>
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<td>Maarike Harro</td>
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<tr>
<td>Director General</td>
<td>Tallinn, Estonia</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Institute for Health Development</td>
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<td>Blue Point Drug Counseling Centre and Ambulance</td>
<td>Budapest, Hungary</td>
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<td>Chance Instead of AIDS Foundation</td>
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<td>Budapest, Hungary</td>
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<td>Hungarian Civil Liberties Union</td>
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<td>Hungarian Narcological Society</td>
<td>Budapest, Hungary</td>
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<td>Farkasinszky Drug Centre</td>
<td>Szeged, Hungary</td>
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<td>Professor Anna Borsodi</td>
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<td>Biological Research Center</td>
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<td>Hungarian Academy of Sciences</td>
<td>Szeged, Hungary</td>
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<td>Alcohol and Drug Aid Centre</td>
<td>Veszprém, Hungary</td>
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<td>Alkohol-Drogsegély Ambulancia (Alcohol- and Drug Aid Centre)</td>
<td>Veszprém, Hungary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kazakhstan National Association of AIDS Service Organizations</td>
<td>Almaty, Kazakhstan</td>
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<td>Kazakhstan Republican AIDS Center</td>
<td>Almaty, Kazakhstan</td>
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<td>Community Organization Credo</td>
<td>Karaganda, Kazakhstan</td>
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<td>Public Foundation Help</td>
<td>Kostanai, Kazakhstan</td>
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<td>Viktoria</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community organization of people living with HIV/AIDS</td>
<td>Pavlodar, Kazakhstan</td>
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<td>Shapagat</td>
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<tr>
<td>living with HIV/AIDS</td>
<td>Temirtau, Kazakhstan</td>
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| Kyrgyz Harm Reduction Association  
"Partners Network"                 | Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan |
| Kyrgyz National Center of Narcology                                        | Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan |
| Soros Foundation - Kyrgyzstan                                              | Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan |
| Mamasobir Burhanov                                                        | Chief Doctor  
Osh Drug Treatment Department  
Osh, Kyrgyzstan |
| Public Foundation Podruga                                                  | Osh, Kyrgyzstan  |
| Soculuc Youth Legal Assistance                                              | Foundation/Global Fund Monitoring  
Project  
Shopokov town/Byshkek, Kyrgyzstan |
| Community Foundation Diaron                                                | Zhalalabat, Kyrgyzstan |
| Klaipeda Center of Addiction Treatment                                      | Klaipeda, Lithuania |
| Coalition on Vulnerable Population "I can live" (Network of 13 NGOs)       | Vilnius, Lithuania |
| Emilis Subata                                                               | Director of Vilnius Center for Addictive  
Disorders  
Vilnius, Lithuania |
| Family Planning and Sexual Health Association                               | Vilnius, Lithuania |
| Lithuanian Positive Group                                                   | Vilnius, Lithuania |
| Lithuanian Psychiatric Association                                          | Vilnius, Lithuania |
| Open Society Fund-Lithuania                                                | Vilnius, Lithuania |
| The Initiative of Drug Users Mutual Support                                 | Vilnius, Lithuania |
| NGO Via Vita                                                               | Bitola, Macedonia |
| NGO Zona                                                                   | Kavadarci, Macedonia |
| NGO Opcija                                                                 | Ohrid, Macedonia |
| NGO HOPS                                                                   | Healthy Options Project Skopje  
Skopje, Macedonia |
| NGO Passage                                                                | Skopje, Macedonia |
| NGO Trust                                                                  | Skopje, Macedonia |
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addictive disorders  
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| NGO Choice                                                                 | Strumica, Macedonia |
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Monar Krakow Drugs Project
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Alianta pentru Lupta Impotriva Alcoolismului si Toxicomaniiilor
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ARAS
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Romanian Harm Reduction Network
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UNOPA
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Astrakhan AIDS Centre, Harm reduction project
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Balakovo, Russian Federation
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Chapaevsk Municipal Medical Association
Chapaevsk, Russian Federation
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Irkutsk section of Red Cross Russian Branch
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Drug Users Group Kolodets
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Omsk Regional Community Movement
“One World, One Hope”
Omsk, Russian Federation

Community Organization "Stupeni"
Perm, Russian Federation

Public Foundation "New Generation"
Perm, Russian Federation

Humanitarian Action Foundation
Saint Petersburg, Russian Federation

Community Organization "Parents against Drugs"
Togliatti, Russian Federation

Center of AIDS Prevention and Treatment
Harm Reduction Department
Tver, Russian Federation

Regional public foundation «Novoye vremya (New time)»
Yekaterinburg, Russian Federation

Yekaterinburg Municipal Charitable Organization «Novye Grani»
Yekaterinburg, Russian Federation

Dr Verica Arsenijevic,
Neuropsychiatrist
Clinical Center of Nish
Clinic for Mental Health Protection,
Drug Addiction Department
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GOD
Generacijski odgovor drogama
Novi Beograd, Serbia and Montenegro

Harm reduction NGO Odyseus
Bratislava, Slovak Republic

Association for Harm Reduction Stigma
Ljubljana, Slovenia

Coordination of Centers for Prevention and Treatment of Drug Addiction at Ministry of Health
Ljubljana, Slovenia
National Center for Treatment of Drug Addiction
Ljubljana, Slovenia
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SEEAAN
South Eastern European Adriatic Addiction Treatment Network
Ljubljana, Slovenia
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Prohealth d.o.o.
Ljubljana, Slovenia
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The Sound of Reflection Foundation
Ljubljana, Slovenia
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Project Coordinator, Behavioral and Infectious Disease Aspects of Injection Drug Use in Tajikistan
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NGO Nuri Umed
Dushanbe, Tajikistan
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"Volunteer" association
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NGO Youth prophylactics and rehabilitation Center DINA
Khudjand, Tajikistan
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Chernovtsy city foundation "New Family"
Chernovtsy, Ukraine
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Virtus Foundation
Dnipropetrovs'k, Ukraine
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All-Ukrainian Harm Reduction Association
Kiev, Ukraine
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All-Ukrainian Network of People Living with HIV
Kiev, Ukraine
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Community organization "Club Eney"
Kiev, Ukraine
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International HIV/AIDS Alliance in Ukraine
Kiev, Ukraine
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Sergey Dvoryak
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Ukrainian Narcological Association
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NGO All Together
Lviv, Ukraine
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Charitable Foundation Yunitus
Nikolaev, Ukraine
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Odessa foundation of rehabilitation and social adaptation of homeless people "Way Home"
Odessa, Ukraine
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Odessa Regional Charitable Foundation For Future without AIDS
Odessa, Ukraine
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Foundation "Public Health"
Poltava, Ukraine
*

Charitable Foundation Hope & Salvation
Simferopol, Ukraine
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Charitable Foundation "Pace Forward"
Sumy, Ukraine
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Public Congress "Stalist"
Vinnitsa, Ukraine
* 
Charitable Foundation Spodivannia
Zaporozh’e, Ukraine
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NGO “Avitsenna”
Andijan, Uzbekistan

NGO “Nozim”
Andijan, Uzbekistan
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Galina Karmanova
Chief of Party,
Drug Demand Reduction Program
in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan (DDRP)
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Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Europe (without Central and Eastern Europe)

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Senior Scientist, Addiction Research Centre (CVO), Utrecht, the Netherlands;
Director DV8 Research, Training & Development, Rotterdam, the Netherlands
Vienna, Austria
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ENCOD (European Coalition for Just And Effective Drug Policies, a platform of 86 European NGOs)
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European Network on Drugs & Infections Prevention in Prison
Brussels, Belgium
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Marc Reisinger, Psychiatrist
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Brussels, Belgium
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Vittorio Agnoletto
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Dr Didier Touzeau, Clinique Liberté
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Karsten Hein, Filmmaker  
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CONCEPT Center for Addiction Medicine  
Chair of Bavarian Academy of Addiction Treatment and Research  
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Münchner Aids-Hilfe  
Munich, Germany  

Action against AIDS Germany  
A network of 70 Aids Service and Development Organisations, Churches and 200 grassroots groups  
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Dr. Barbara Krumme  
Medical Mission Institute, Working Group Cooperation in Need & Disaster  
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Irish Penal Reform Trust  
Dublin, Ireland  

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Italian Addiction Association of Puglia  
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Dott. Gaetano Dervu  
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Dr Carla Gambarana, M.D.
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School of Medicine
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LILÀ NAZIONALE
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AMOC/DHV
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AIDS & Mobility Europe
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Promotion and Disease Prevention
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AM Woerden, The Netherlands

Euro-Methwork
Amsterdam, The Netherlands

LSD
National Interest Group of Drug Users
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Professor, Unit for Addiction Medicine,
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Abraço - associação de apoio a
pessoas infectadas e afectadas pelo
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Lisbon, Portugal

GAT
Grupo de Activistas sobre
Tratamientos de VIH/SIDA
Lisbon, Portugal

Dr Teresa Pointing
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Drug and Alcohol Service
Bath, UK

Neil Hunt,
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Director of Research, KCA;
Senior Research Associate, University
of Kent;
Honorary Research Fellow, Centre for
Research on Drugs and Health
Behaviour, Imperial College;
Honorary Researcher, South London
and Maudsley NHS Trust
Eccles, UK

Substance Misuse Directorate
Primary Care and Community Division
NHS Lothian
Edinburgh, Scotland, UK
T3E
Training
Enfield, UK
*

REFORM
Drug Policy Interest Group
Essex. RM, UK
*

HIT
Liverpool, UK
*

United Kingdom Harm Reduction
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Reliable Information About Drugs And Related Issues  
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REDC  
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North America

Undun  
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International Society of Addiction  
Calgary Alberta, Canada
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Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network  
Montréal, Canada
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Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse  
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The Canadian Harm Reduction Network  
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Vermont Harm Reduction Coalition
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