

## Press Release



26 June 2015

### **Delhi joins the Support. Don't Punish Global Day of Action for better drug policies that prioritise public health and human rights.**

**Citizens take to the streets to protest current drug policies and call for an end to the senseless criminalization of drug users**

**New Delhi (June 26, 2015):** Participants from across New Delhi came together to be a part of the global 'Support. Don't Punish' campaign to highlight the harm that is being caused by the criminalization of people who use drugs. The day's events brought together policymakers, government representatives, media, civil society organizations and concerned individuals.

June 26<sup>th</sup> is observed as the United Nations' International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking (World Drug Day). This day has traditionally been used by governments to 'celebrate' drug arrests, seizures and even executions. The *Support. Don't Punish* Global Day of Action is an effort to change the narrative and highlight the need for a better approach towards drug policies.

India HIV/AIDS Alliance, Indian Drug Users' Forum (IDUF), Delhi Drug Users Forum and community partners organized a rally at Jantar Mantar to promote respect for the human rights of people who use drugs and raise awareness on how punitive laws impede access to essential health services.

Following the solidarity rally, a panel discussion was held at the Constitution Club of India. The main focus of the discussion was on "Solutions to the Drug Problem: what's working and what's not working in India".

The key note address was given by **Shri P.D. Rai**, Member of Parliament, Secretary Northeast MP Forum and member Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance, who implored, "Civil Society should work closely with parliamentarians so that integral changes can be brought about at the policy level."

**James Robertson**, Executive Director of India HIV/AIDS Alliance, said, "Drug policies that respect human rights and protect public health should be promoted. We should work towards changing laws and policies that impede access to harm reduction interventions and end the criminalisation of people who use drugs".

The UNAIDS Country Director in India, **Dr. Oussama Tawil**, reiterated, "Work needs to be sustained and expanded at every level. Investments must be made to reduce the vulnerability of people who use drugs to HIV and other harms."

While highlighting the importance of an open discussion between all stakeholders, **Shri Anand Grover**, former UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health, Senior Advocate in the Supreme Court of India and Member of the Global Commission on Drug Policy said, "Decriminalization of possession and promotion of treatment are the need of the hour. A balance should be maintained between regulation and decriminalization with the purpose being to stop traffickers in India".

**G. Charanjit Sharma**, Secretary Indian Drug Users Forum ended by stressing, "It is important to see that minimum standards of care are being implemented at the private treatment centres".

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**About India HIV/AIDS Alliance:**

Founded in 1999, India HIV/AIDS Alliance is a non-governmental organisation operating in partnership with civil society, government and communities to support sustained responses to HIV in India that protect rights and improve health. Complementing the Indian national programme, we build capacity, provide technical support and advocate to strengthen the delivery of effective, innovative, community-based HIV programmes to vulnerable populations affected by the epidemic.

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