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Close Compulsory Drug Detention Centers

The International Doctors for Healthy Drug Policies (IDHDP) joins the World Medical Association, International Federation of Health and Human Rights Organizations and others in the call to end the practice of detaining men, women and children - without due process and against their will - in administrative drug detention centers.

These closed facilities purport to be “treatment” centers, but in reality they provide little or no medical care, insufficient food and, in some countries, detainees are forced to work or face severe punishment.

“Evidence-based treatment is crucial for people who are dependent on drugs. Drug dependency is a chronic medical condition and should be treated like any other. There is no role for coercion or punishment in evidence-based treatment,” said IDHDP Medical Director, Dr. Chris Ford.

From more than forty years of research, we know that opioid substitution therapy works very well to reduce injecting drug use and the harms that can be associated with drug use. It helps prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS and hepatitis, prevents overdose deaths and reduces involvement in criminality. From the evidence we also know that long-term treatment works and if abstinence is enforced rather than patient led then relapse is the rule, not the exception. We also know from the evidence that the more successful treatment programmes are those that have empathic staff who work to enhance motivation of individuals to change behavior. Coercion or punishment would therefore actually be contra-therapeutic and diminish rather than enhance successful treatment outcomes

Both methadone and buprenorphine (opioid maintenance treatments) are on the World Health Organization’s list of essential medicines. The WHO, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and UNAIDS, among other leading organizations all support opioid substitution therapy.

We applaud the introduction of opioid maintenance treatment with methadone and buprenorphine in countries struggling to address dual epidemics of HIV and injecting drug use. Making the most effective treatment for opiate addiction available to drug users helps prevent the spread of HIV and hepatitis and deaths due to overdose and is a very important step for the health of the community as a whole.

We strongly encourage all countries to provide access to these life-saving treatments on a scale that is commensurate with the need in their communities. The treatment must be available to all who need and want it, and it must be voluntary and in accordance with the highest standards of medical care and human rights.

We call on governments to close down Compulsory Drug Detention Centers as they are an abuse of human rights and have nothing to do with treatment.

For further information, please contact:

Dr. Chris Ford
Medical Director
International Doctors for Healthy Drug Policies
+ 442073286164
+ 447939000254
Chris.Ford@idhdp.com

International Doctors for Healthy Drug Policies (IDHDP) is a network for medical doctors to share expertise and good practice in reducing the health, social and economic harms of people who use drugs and, with them at the centre. We represent doctors who treat drug addiction from more than 35 countries worldwide.

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