



February 24th, 2011

Honorable Abhisit Vejjajiva

Prime Minister of Thailand,

Thailand

Dear Prime Minister,

We are writing to express the concerns of the International Doctors for Healthy Drug Policies (“IDHDP”) about a report published on 17 February 2011 by the National News Bureau of Thailand stating that “*30,000 drug users will be brought to rehabilitation camps*” (1). The article states that some going to the camps will be brought against their will. It also mentions a database which will keep information on those detained. This news is very alarming, especially given recent reports about drug detention camps that infringe on the rights of drug users sent to them (2).

IDHDP is a growing organization for medical doctors from over 33 countries all over the world. Our purpose is to share expertise and best practice in reducing the health, social, and economic harms of drug use and to influence practice and policy. There is a gap between evidence-based practice and drug policy in many countries, and IDHDP aims to lobby internationally to promote harm reduction and the creation of healthy drug policies.

As experienced medical professionals who work in treatment services for those with addiction problems, we are certain that coercive treatment is not therapeutic and goes against the fundamental principles of best practice. Successful evidence-based medical treatment of addiction is characterized by therapeutic work to enhance the motivation of patients to change behaviours. Coercion has no role in addiction treatment modalities (3)

Research findings around the world confirm that there is no dichotomy between the interests of drug users and those of the general society. Our advocacy of a more promising and effective approach for drug users is based on our conviction of what is best for the entire community.

We believe that none of these coercive ‘treatments’ are evidence based and are an abuse of human rights. The Thai government will be aware of events in 2003 and that violent and punitive approaches to drug use have no useful outcomes. The campaign in 2003 has been widely condemned both in Thailand and internationally (4).

All the evidence informs us that drug dependence is a medical and social condition improved by care and support and made worse by punishment. Drug detention centres have no place to the treatment of drug dependence treatment. HIV prevention measures, Opiate Substitution Therapy and other evidence-based medical standards have been provided successfully in Thailand for many years – it is these that require expansion.

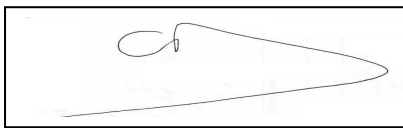
Yury Fedotov, the New Director General of the United Nations Office at Vienna and

Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (“UNODC”), took office in September 2010. He has announced his intention to focus on a public health and human rights-based approach to treating people who use drugs. Appointed by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Mr. Fedotov will forge UNODC’s drugs and crime policy, placing a strong emphasis on safeguarding health, human rights and justice. He has stated “UNODC works to improve the lives of people and communities worldwide. Public health and human rights must therefore be central to that work.” (5)

In light of the above mentioned international policy changes and our group’s clinical experience and expertise, the IDHDP asks that you urgently reconsider the recent policy decisions and instead move toward expanding the healthy drug treatment provision that already exists in many parts of Thailand.

As a large group of doctors with a great deal of experience in addiction management we are ready to provide any assistance if required.

Yours sincerely,



Drs Broers, Roth, Orgel, Yates and Ford on behalf of International Doctors for Healthy Drug Policies (IDHDP)

cc: Mr. Jurin Laksanawisit, Minister of Public Health

Mr. Chavarat Charnvirakul, Minister of Interior

Mr. Pirapan Salirathavibhaga Pol. Lt. Patcharawath Wongsuwan, Police Chief Royal Thai Police

Ms. Sureeprapha Trivej, Secretary-General, Office of the Narcotics Control Board

References:

- 1) National News Bureau of Thailand (Feb 17th 2011)
<http://thainews.prd.go.th/en/news.php?id=255402170016>
- 2) Human Rights Watch: Skin in the cable (2010) <http://www.hrw.org/node/87692>
- 3) Drug misuse and dependence: UK guidelines on clinical management
http://www.nta.nhs.uk/uploads/clinical_guidelines_2007.pdf
- 4) Human Rights Watch: Thailand: Not Enough Graves—The War on Drugs, HIV/AIDS, and Violations of Human Rights (2004)
<http://www.hrw.org/reports/2004/thailand0704/index.htm>
- 5) United Nations Information Services, press release September 2010: New UN drugs and crime chief to focus on public health and rights-based approach
<http://www.unis.unvienna.org/unis/pressrels/2010/unisinf386.html>