Why the HIV Community Should Support Decriminalization of Drug Use

Wednesday 25th July, 11-12, Global Village Harm Reduction and Drug Policy Networking Zone, Hall B, 803

Chair:
   JVR Prasada Rao (International HIV/AIDS Alliance, UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for AIDS in Asia and the Pacific)

Speakers:
   Mandeep Dhaliwal (UNDP, Global Commission on HIV and the Law)
   Alexei Kurmanaevskii (International Network of People Who Use Drugs)
   Lasha Goguadze (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies)

The criminalization of people who use drugs (directly criminalising use, or indirectly through criminalizing possession) has been a central pillar of illicit drug control around the world for decades. This punitive approach has come under increasing scrutiny at local and international levels as a structural risk factor for HIV transmission, as the threat of criminal penalties and police harassment drives injecting drug use into unhygienic marginal environments, and as prison populations increase.

In addition the acute and intentional stigma associated with drug use, and reflected in criminal laws geared towards widespread social disapproval, results in multiple forms of discrimination, including in access to ARVs and to healthcare, and in the further pushing of people who use drugs underground and away from services.

These harms are well known, but despite them, the vast majority of countries continue to pursue the same law enforcement-driven approaches, fuelled by widespread public support.

This session will draw on learning from the Global Commission on HIV and the Law, and on the experiences of both people who use drugs and service providers. It will make the case that the entire HIV community should support people who use drugs and growing calls for decriminalisation.

The Criminalize Hate not HIV campaign www.hivandthelaw.com was launched in Vienna in 2010. This campaign is gathering momentum as a result of many people in various corners of the world committed to speaking out on issues relating to the criminalization of HIV.