

Rome, 23rd February '10

To the Chair of the HDG

To the chair of EU group in Vienna

As a group of NGOs and professionals working in the field of drug addiction and as the main organizations involved in harm reduction policies and programs in Italy, we are deeply concerned about the position of Italian government on harm reduction, as expressed in the policy paper "Measures and concrete actions for the prevention of drug related diseases". In particular, we do not agree that the definition of Harm Reduction should exclude some measures (like pill testing, Heroin Assisted Treatments and Drug Consumption Rooms, as quoted in the addendum to the policy paper). We believe that every European country should be committed to basing policies on scientific evidences, not on prejudice and ideology: in this perspective, the knowledge gathered by experimentations and trials of innovative programs in some European countries should be seen positively in view of the development of European drug policies.

We understand that the Italian government representatives have been presenting this position to you as arising from a wide consultation with NGOs and professional bodies. This is misleading - we would like to make it clear the Italian policy positions "on prevention of drug related diseases" are not a "consensus" agreed between the Department of Drug Policies and the NGOs in the advisory group: some of the NGOs undersigning this letter took part in the discussion on the issue at the Department of Drug Policies, but they did not subscribe to the document on the whole. In addition, some NGOs boycotted the whole process because of its ideological nature.

Furthermore, we regret the fact that our government representatives are using this paper to challenge the European-wide position on Harm Reduction that has been carefully negotiated over many years, and is represented in the European Union Drug Strategy 2005-2012, that Italy is a signatory to. We regret that this important public health issue is being treated in such a political way.

We hope this statement will help to clarify the debate at the European level on such an important issue as Harm Reduction policies. We would be grateful if you could share it with your colleagues.

Yours faithfully

Giorgio Bignami (president of Forum Droghe), Maurizio Coletti (president of Itaca Italia), Leopoldo Grosso (vicepresident of Gruppo Abele), Riccardo De Facci (representative of Coordinamento Nazionale Comunità di Accoglienza for drug policies), Andrea Gallo (president of Comunità San Benedetto al Porto, Genova), Edoardo Polidori (Itaca Italia), Claudio Cippitelli (Coordinamento Nazionale Nuove Droghe), Grazia Zuffa (Fuoriluogo), Fabio Scaltritti (Comunità San Benedetto al Porto, Genova), Henri Margaron (director of Drug Addiction Department, Livorno), Stefano Vecchio (director of Drug Addiction Department, Napoli), Massimo Oldrini (representative of Lega Italiana Lotta Aids).