



NEWSRELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SUBJECT:

**GNP+ and ICW joint position paper
on Injecting Drug Users and Access
to HIV Treatment**

GNP+ and ICW: Harm reduction central to HIV prevention for Injecting Drug Users.

“Being an active drug user is not a valid criterion for denying an individual access to HIV treatment and care.” - Mauro Guarinieri, Chair of GNP+, former injecting drug user

The Global Network of People living with HIV/AIDS (GNP+) and the International Community of Women Living with HIV and AIDS (ICW) today released their Joint Position Paper on Injecting Drug Users and Access to HIV Treatment.

More than two decades after the AIDS epidemic was first recognized, HIV transmission through injecting drug use is an increasingly serious public health problem in many parts of the world. Recent estimates indicate that on a global scale at least 10 percent of all new HIV infections can be attributed to injecting drug use. When one excludes Africa, the percentage rises to 30 percent.

Researching the position paper GNP+ and ICW were shocked to find injecting drug users have a disproportioned low level of access to antiretroviral therapy.

Even though in some countries injecting drug users account for up to 80 percent of HIV infections, injecting drug users represent only 7 percent of the people on antiretroviral therapy.

“We believe that being an active drug user is not a valid criterion for denying an individual access to treatment and care,” says Mauro Guarinieri, Chair of GNP+ and himself a former injecting drug user: “Antiretroviral therapy is a proven means to improve the prognosis and quality of life of all people living with HIV and AIDS.”

GNP+ and ICW strongly support harm reduction as the most effective and evidence based means of preventing HIV and other blood borne infections among injecting drug users.

The United Nations, and particularly UNAIDS and its cosponsors, should take a stand against any attempt to deny or limit access to life saving interventions such as needle and syringe exchange and other services for people who inject drugs.

At the national level, GNP+ and ICW urge governments, including bi-lateral donor agencies, to adopt and promote harm reduction as best public health practice.

“Antiretroviral therapy is a starting point. It provides an incentive for HIV-positive injecting drug users, to make contact with health care services,” says Mr. Guarinieri: “These services can facilitate prevention, HIV voluntary counselling and testing as well as AIDS care, support and treatment. They are also a prime entry point for the treatment of other co-morbidities like TB and hepatitis B and C.”

Repressive national drug policies are among the main obstacles to adequate access to effective HIV prevention and treatment programmes for injecting drug users. Consequently, GNP+ and ICW will support all efforts aimed to pressure governments to repeal drug laws and policies that impede access for injecting drug users to HIV prevention and treatment, and other health services. Both organisations commit to establishing better and stronger links between PLHIV, harm reduction and drug users’ groups.

Injecting drug use is responsible for HIV infection through sharing contaminated needles and syringes and other drug injecting equipment by several people. In addition, HIV is transmitted sexually to the partners of injecting drug users and potentially to their children through mother to child transmission.

Decades of public health research provide a strong base of evidence for the effectiveness of harm reduction interventions and international human rights commitments should compel support for these interventions.

“Governments that limit access to needle and syringe exchange, to opioid substitution therapies and related services do more as endangering the lives of injecting drug users, their sexual partners and children,” says Carmen Tarrades, development officer at ICW and former injecting drug user: “These governments are actively supporting the spread of HIV and AIDS. They make the HIV pandemic worse.”

The Joint Position Paper is now available in English, Spanish and Russian. You can find it at www.gnpplus.net and at www.icw.org

ENDS

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Background information:

The Global Network of People living with HIV/AIDS (GNP+) is a global network for and by people with HIV/AIDS. The mission of GNP+ is to work to improve the quality of life of people living with HIV/AIDS. GNP+ achieves its mission through advocacy, capacity building, and communications programs that draw from strategies based on: ADVOCATING for Inclusion, Visibility, Access, Rights; LINKING by Networking, Mentorship, Dialogue, Education; SHARING of Capacities, Knowledge, Strength, Resources. www.gnpplus.net

The International Community of Women Living with HIV/AIDS (ICW) is the only international network of HIV positive women. ICW has 3000 members in 134 countries. ICW works for a world where all HIV-positive women enjoy respected and meaningful involvement at all political levels, have full access to

care and treatment; and enjoy full rights irrespective of culture, age, religion, sexuality, social or economic status/class and race. www.icw.org



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