

Sergey Votyagov, *Executive Director, Eurasian Harm Reduction Network*

Rick Lines, *Executive Director, Harm Reduction International*

Allan Clear, *Executive Director, Harm Reduction Coalition*

Mat Southwell, *on behalf of the International Network of People Who Use Drugs*

August 31, 2011

To: Dr. Margaret Chan, *Director-General, World Health Organization,*
Yury Fedotov, *Executive Director, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime,*
Michel Sidibe, *Executive Director, UNAIDS, and*
Michel Kazatchkine, *Executive Director, Global Fund to Fight Aids, Tuberculosis, and Malaria*

Today, on the International Overdose Awareness Day, Eurasian Harm Reduction Network, Harm Reduction Coalition (USA), Harm Reduction International and the International Network of People who Use Drugs (INPUD) call for WHO, UNODC, UNAIDS and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS to mobilize their efforts and play a leading role in a coordinated response to drug overdose mortality on the global level.

Overdose is a major cause of preventable death in many regions of the world. Although the scale of this problem is significant, the number of overdose prevention programs is severely limited. Naloxone is a safe and easy-to-administer medicine that helps to instantly reverse opiate overdose. Naloxone is now distributed among people who use drugs and their families in countries such as the U.S., Tajikistan, and China, and has been demonstrated to help reverse overdose and to engage drug users in receiving other HIV prevention services.¹

In its *Information Note: Harm Reduction For People Who Use Drugs*, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria refers to the direct relation between overdose and HIV-related harm reduction services and encourages countries to consider including training on overdose prevention and low-threshold provision of naloxone in their proposals.² Yet, there are no internationally accepted guidelines either on community-based drug overdose prevention, or on broader issues of overdose registration and surveillance and on improving health systems' capacity to address fatal and non-fatal overdoses.

At the 54th Commission on Narcotic Drugs, Eurasian Harm Reduction Network, Harm Reduction Coalition (USA), and Harm Reduction International held a satellite session "Illicit Drug Overdose: Major Cause of Preventable Death" that received positive feedback from stakeholders representing governments, international organizations, and NGOs. The session concluded with an agreement to move on with mobilizing a global response to overdose mortality and organizing a joint meeting, before the end of 2011, to discuss what the next steps should be and how they need to be coordinated.

¹ Eurasian Harm Reduction Network, Open Society Institute (2010). Why overdose matters for HIV.

² Global Fund Information Note: Harm Reduction for People Who Use Drugs (June 2011).

We see the Overdose Awareness Day as an opportunity to remind you of the urgent necessity of the meeting to **mobilize an international response to overdose mortality**, and ask to meet with your agency's respective departments in Geneva later in 2011. The meeting will give the WHO, UNODC, UNAIDS, the Global Fund and leading NGOs an opportunity to consolidate their efforts on developing guidance for better overdose data collection and public health response.

Proposed issues to discuss during the meeting include the following:

- Presentation of data available on overdose mortality and response globally and in the Eastern Europe and Central Asia;
- Development of international guidelines for strengthening health systems and community systems to (a) improve the situation with overdose data collection and (b) implement effective interventions to address fatal and non-fatal overdoses.

The Secretariat of Eurasian Harm Reduction Network has recently held a study of the overdose-related situation and current responses in 12 Eastern European and Central Asian countries and can share the study report and its findings that provide evidence for the need to strengthen the response to overdose mortality.

If your agency supports the idea of holding the meeting, please contact Dasha Ocheret, Manager for Policy and Advocacy Program, at dasha@harm-reduction.org.

Sincerely,

Sergey Votyagov, Executive Director, Eurasian Harm Reduction Network

Rick Lines, Executive Director, Harm Reduction International

Allan Clear, Executive Director, Harm Reduction Coalition

Mat Southwell, on behalf of the International Network of People Who Use Drugs