

Video Statement Transcript

By: Bikas Gurung – Asian Network of People who Use Drugs (ANPUD)

Video begins with a screen with the Texts below (3 seconds):

On behalf of the Asian Network of People who Use Drugs (ANPUD), I would like to thank the Chair of this CND intersessional meeting and everyone present in the room for this opportunity to contribute by presenting the perspectives of people who use drugs – the people who are most affected by the decisions made here.

Statement begins:

1. We are gravely concerned and we call for immediate end of the unlawful war on drugs approach that has resulted in brutal killings of thousands of people suspected of using or selling drugs and tens of thousands of people are being incarcerated without any fair trial. We are also concerned by the fact that our community members continue to be detained in the name of “drug treatment” inside compulsory detention centers and private rehabs where their fundamental rights are being violated on a daily basis.
2. Between 2008 and 2013, UN agencies¹ and community & civil society organizations had called for immediate closure of compulsory detention centers for drug users in the countries in Southeast Asia.² In spite of these international calls and the commitments of some country governments to transition these detentions into a voluntary community-based treatment, the number of facilities and detained people continue to remain high in Southeast Asia. In 2014, over 450,000 people were detained in 948 facilities in only seven countries of the region.³
3. Numerous private treatment centers continue to operate with little to no supervision by the states in South Asia region. These rehabs are compulsory and labor intensive camps that are mostly run by untrained staffs. A study in Nepal found that these rehabs are programmed to torture drug users in the name of “Therapeutic Treatment”. Every year many people die due to the torture and lack of timely access to health services inside these private rehabs.
4. UNODC estimates only around 11% of the total number of people who use drugs worldwide experience drug dependence and may need treatment. However, current treatment model seems to generalize that all drug users need treatment. The goal of

¹ Like UNODC, WHO, UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, UN Special Rapporteur on Health, WHO, UNAIDS, The Global Fund, UNICEF, ILO, OHCHR, UNDP, UN Women.

² Compulsory drug detention in East and Southeast Asia: Evolving government, UN and donor responses: [https://www.ijdp.org/article/S0955-3959\(13\)00093-5/fulltext](https://www.ijdp.org/article/S0955-3959(13)00093-5/fulltext)

³ Compulsory treatment of drug use in Southeast Asian countries: [https://www.ijdp.org/article/S0955-3959\(18\)30171-3/fulltext](https://www.ijdp.org/article/S0955-3959(18)30171-3/fulltext)

current treatment model to achieve total abstinence by detaining people under inhumane and degrading conditions is flawed. Such goal incites violation of human rights and has resulted in overdose cases after release.

5. If someone told you that “You are a weak person”, you would probably respond with aggression or let it go easily. If more people in your life repeatedly described you as weak person for over a period of time, you may start losing your confidence and gradually feel weak. Can you imagine how a person inside the treatment would feel having to deal everyday with the discriminative labels like addict, social evil, mentally ill person and criminal. Many studies have evidently shown that labeling a person discriminatively is directly associated with violence and harmful use of substances.
6. The compulsory detention centers and private rehabs in South and Southeast Asia are detaining drug users because “Treatment” has become a lucrative business. The goal of dependence treatment should be to reduce drug-use related harms by empowering people to make informed decisions about their drug use through methods that respect their human rights and dignity.
7. It can be safely said that, as a young person or a teenager, almost everyone breaks some rules or does things that are illegal. May it be one puff of cigarette at minor age or a puff of Marijuana or a fight we picked or violating others privacy, all of us have done something that could have put us into trouble. Many of you got lucky but it could have so easily been one of you suffering inside those detention centers or prisons.
8. Almost 60 years ago, the journey to solve the world drug problem started by abandoning the solution - which is legal regulation of demand and supply of drugs. We have a misconception that legal regulation of drugs means drugs would become free for all. What we do not realize is that by prohibition and criminalization governments have voluntarily handed over entire drugs market to the illicit market or dark world and ensured that drugs are free for all. Today, we live in this dark world where thousands of kinds of drugs are widely available more than ever before. Drugs are available for anyone and everyone who wishes to use them. Imagine what would happen if we would turn on the lights and end darkness. We would be able to keep track of everything, regulate demand and divert current illicit drug market revenue to the national budget. This act of “Turning the lights ON” is legal regulation of drugs. We need to have an independent evaluation of current drug laws and policies and welcome reforms that protect human rights and that are based on evidence.
9. Governments and policy makers should meaningfully engage people who use drugs and avail the experience and expertise that our communities have to offer. This is no time to name, shame or blame. You work for an ideal drug free world. We work because the world will always be full of drugs and therefore, no one – not even you, your children and grand children, as a result of their drug use – would have to suffer the torture, humiliations, discrimination, social exclusion and preventable deaths that

thousands of our community members have endured. No human and living beings deserve the pain and sufferings inflicted upon us. People do not lose their human rights simply because they use or sell drugs.

Thank You.