



Message from UNODC Executive Director Mr. Yury Fedotov on the occasion of the World AIDS Day, 1 December

Access to HIV and Drug Dependence Treatment Services Is a Right

UNAIDS, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, has recently agreed on a new vision statement: “Zero new HIV infections. Zero AIDS related deaths. Zero discrimination.” For UNODC, one of the ten co-sponsors of UNAIDS, this vision gives a clear directive to our work: to strive for zero new HIV infections among drug users and in closed settings, including prisons.

I believe that the goal of zero new HIV infections is attainable. However, evidence from the past ten years indicates that this vision can only be achieved if a comprehensive package of interventions is implemented on a large enough scale. Last year, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, the UNAIDS Programme Coordination Board, and the Economic and Social Council agreed on just such a comprehensive package of interventions. UNODC is committed to lead this effort in the areas of drug use and prisons.

UNODC is promoting an integrated response to the HIV epidemic among drug users, including prevention of drug use, treatment of drug dependence and measures to protect health. A well-coordinated network of services for drug-dependence treatment, HIV prevention measures, AIDS treatment interventions and social protection will succeed in stopping HIV.

Similarly, UNODC promotes comprehensive HIV prevention and treatment in closed settings. We link these human rights-based and gender-sensitive efforts with criminal justice and prison reform initiatives and community HIV programmes and services.

But serious challenges remain. The HIV epidemic among drug users is spreading in some countries, and prisons continue to be a breeding ground for HIV. In too many countries prisons suffer from appalling, substandard conditions, including serious overcrowding, poor hygienic conditions and inadequate management. The human rights and dignity of prisoners are often not guaranteed, and their rights to access to health care and preventive, curative, reproductive and palliative services are often not respected.

While there is converging agreement on what needs to be done to halt and reverse the HIV epidemics among drug users and in closed settings, the main obstacles to achieving zero new HIV infections still remain: inadequate and often conflicting national policies and legislation; insufficient financial and human resources; and discrimination against drug users, prisoners and people living with HIV.

We must continue doing what we know works, but we also have to do much more to meet our commitment to universal access to HIV prevention. We have to help Member States, particularly low-income countries, to develop their own integrated strategy for responding to drug-use disorders and the related HIV epidemic. If we can do this, we can stop the spread of HIV.