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Dear colleagues,

With this letter, we would like to continue the communication we started in advance of the 5th Eastern Europe and Central Asia AIDS Conference (EECAAC 2016)¹ regarding the ongoing actions of the Russian Government to openly and actively denounce key evidence-based HIV prevention methods.

As civil society organizations working for access to HIV prevention treatment and care services and protection of human rights of key affected populations we would like to inform you about yet another recent alarming development in Russia which happened on the margins of EECAAC 2016 which recently took place in Moscow and was co-organized by UNAIDS.

On March 14, 2016 the Ministry of Health of Russian Federation (MoH) published its official explicitly negative Position on opioid substitution treatment (OST)². In its Position, the MoH characterizes OST as a non-evidence-based approach that should not be widely used by the majority of countries in the world. It also tries to create the impression of a tendency among countries to refuse to implement OST programs as well as harm reduction approaches. More importantly, in its Position, the MoH also tries to create the misleading impression that OST is not only an ineffective approach to HIV prevention among people who use opioids, but in fact the opposite – that OST is a possible cause of the spread of HIV infection among people who inject drugs in some of those countries where it is implemented. Apart from the very disturbing fact that the Ministry bases its opinion on misleading facts and blatantly false data, Russia is actively communicating this position to other EECA countries to arm OST opponents.

Subsequently, on March 23, 2016 during the opening session of the EECAAC 2016, the Director of the Federal Drug Control Service (FDCS) Victor Ivanov repeatedly announced³ the FDCS' plans for

¹ <http://en.rylkov-fond.org/blog/arf-advocacy/arf-advocacy-national/eecaac2016en/>

² Please find the unofficial translation of the MoH Position on OST attached to this letter

³ Speech of Victor Ivanov at the opening session of EECAAC 2016 is available at http://www.fskn.gov.ru/includes/periodics/events_main/2016/0323/045843287/detail.shtml



legal reforms aimed at subjecting up to 5 million people who use drugs under the mandatory drug rehabilitation. Mr. Ivanov explicitly mentioned that such a measure is necessary as a response to the growing epidemic of HIV in Russia among people who use drugs. As you know, Mr. Ivanov was a keynote speaker during the EECAAC 2016. This fact, as well as the MoH's official position against OST and its complete lack of support for provision of other harm reduction services, leaves no doubts that the key message of Russia to EECAAC participants and other international actors is that the core of the response to rapidly growing HIV epidemics in Russia and other countries in the region should be mandatory rehabilitation for people who use drugs.

Given such a clear and disturbing message from the Russian government, we wonder if we could expect any official reaction from UNAIDS regional office on this Position of MoH of Russian Federation and request that you share the plan of UNAIDS for mitigating the obvious negative human rights and health consequences of Russia's non-evidence-based and harmful approach to responding to the epidemic at both the country and regional levels.

Sincerely,

<p>Anya Sarang</p> <p>President</p> <p>Andrey Rylkov Foundation for Health and Social Justice (Russia)</p>	<p>Richard Elliott</p> <p>Executive Director</p> <p>Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network</p>
<p>Dr. Rick Lines</p> <p>Executive Director</p> <p>Harm Reduction International</p>	<p>Christine Stegling</p> <p>Executive Director</p> <p>International HIV/AIDS Alliance</p>
<p>Alena Asaeva</p> <p>On behalf of the Steering Committee</p> <p>Eurasian Network of People who Use Drugs (ENPUD)</p>	<p>Sergey Votyagov</p> <p>Executive Director</p> <p>Eurasian Harm Reduction Network (EHRN) NGO with the Special Consultative Status with Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)</p>
<p>Anke van Dam</p> <p>Executive Director</p> <p>AIDS Foundation East-West (AFEW)</p>	<p>Robin Montgomery</p> <p>Executive Director</p> <p>Interagency Coalition on AIDS and Development (ICAD)</p>



<p>Andriy Klepikov</p> <p>Executive Director</p> <p>Alliance for Public Health (Ukraine)</p>	<p>Niamh Eastwood</p> <p>Executive Director</p> <p>Release (UK)</p>
<p>Latsin Alijev</p> <p>Director</p> <p>NGO Estonian Network PLWHIV</p>	<p>Olga Belyaeva</p> <p>Head of Board</p> <p>Association of Substitution Treatment Advocates of Ukraine</p>