



DRUG POLICY, HIV AND HUMAN RIGHTS

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Goal of Satellite Session: To open the debate on drug policy, its relation with HIV, and the impact it has on the global AIDS response, specifically in the Central American Region.

The main topic of the CONCASIDA was: *Youth and HIV, for our right to know and decide*. The session on drug policy, HIV and human rights aimed to open a space in the Congress agenda to talk about the transversality of harm reduction and drug policy on HIV and AIDS related topics. The participation of Youth R.I.S.E. was intended to add to the panel the youth perspective which generally is absent when talking about drug policy in the region. Talking points focused on the importance of adding a vision of harm reduction to the existent AIDS strategic programmes in the region.

As the only young person talking at the panel the main objective was to highlight how generally the drug policies on the region criminalise drug users, meanwhile youth are the population with higher prevalence on drugs use. At this point, the lack of young persons involved on the development of drug policies with a human rights perspective lead in serious problems in Central America.

The session was enriched by the regional representative of the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO), who underlined the importance of youth involvement on the search of solutions to mitigate the impact of HIV and AIDS especially among young drug users. The session was important for the Congress as it was the first time on the history of the CONCASIDA that drug policies is included in the program with youth included in the panel. Public in general and representatives from different countries and organisations concluded that drug policy and harm reduction is a topic not always included on the global HIV agenda, and showed their commitment to give visibility to harm reduction and drug policy related topics.

In Central America none of the countries have laws and standards that allow free needle exchange. Organisations shared their experiences and good practices on giving assistance to drug users and concluded that the lack of support from governments hinders the advances on the region.

One of the results gained at the Congress and in particular at the satellite session was the interest of other organisations to make alliances with youth to talk about the inclusion of harm reduction related topics in their programmes and agendas. The PAHO recognised that is very important to include harm reduction on strategic plans to prevent HIV and committed to urge other organisations and governments to make it an essential part of the strategic plan of the global AIDS response, underlining the importance of including youth on the development of drug policies to give it a human rights perspective and be aware of the youth reality before taking decisions that will affect our lives and put our communities at risk.

We accorded to follow up on the commitment made by the PAHO and to keep on advocating to have drug policies based on our need and far from discrimination and stigma which we found a big obstacle to keep on advancing to develop effective strategies to mitigate the HIV and AIDS impact and to stop criminalising drug users what means a falling back on public policies and human rights' respect.