



## **FIGHT HIV/AIDS NOT PEOPLE WITH HIV/AIDS** **Day of protest scheduled at Russian Embassies throughout the world**

One of the greatest health and human rights catastrophes of our times is currently playing itself out in the Russian Federation. In most of the developed world, the AIDS epidemic amongst people who inject drugs (PWIDs) has abated as a result of the implementation and scale-up of evidence-based harm reduction programmes including opioid substitution treatment and needle and syringe exchange programmes. Research shows that countries which implemented evidence-based harm reduction programmes early on, including many countries in Europe, have successfully contained and reversed HIV infection rates among people who inject drugs, most such countries have prevalence rates amongst PWIDs of less than 5%.<sup>1</sup> In Russia, by contrast, an ideological refusal to implement, or even legalise such programmes has fuelled a pandemic in which 37.2% of 1.7 million PWIDs are estimated to be living with HIV (although in some regions prevalence rates are up to 75%).

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of December, International AIDS Day, the International Network of People who Use Drugs (INPUD), and local organisations of people who use drugs in several countries around the world will lead protests for the millions of Russian people who use drugs who have needlessly lost their lives. These deaths are directly attributable to the brutal nature of Russian drug policies, which instead of offering treatment force opiate users into confined detox programmes, which are often little more than prison camps.

The evidence for the effectiveness of harm reduction programmes at reducing and reversing HIV transmission is internationally recognized and endorsed by international bodies. Amongst those calling for the implementation of comprehensive harm reduction packages are UNODC, UNAIDS, and WHO.

We therefore call upon the Russian government to:

- Provide the life-saving programmes for those most at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS, this includes OST and NSP for people who inject drugs.
- Cease criminalizing the use of illicit drugs, which is in and of itself a major barrier dissuading people who use drugs from accessing the few services that are available.
- Begin providing ART to people who use drugs.
- Replace the current punitive, coercive, discriminatory approach to people who use drugs with a human rights and science based one, including the right to liberty and security of person, the right to health, the right to be free from torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and punishment, and the right to be free from discrimination.
- Cease persecuting Russian activists and organisations that are calling for change and the introduction of harm reduction, human rights based measures.
- Recognise that people who use drugs must be at the forefront of designing programmes and policies aimed at improving our lives.

[www.inpud.net](http://www.inpud.net)

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Protests: December 1st at Russian Embassies from 16-18hr local times in London, Stockholm, Berlin, Bucharest, New York, Sydney/Canberra, Barcelona, and Toronto. Location updates:

<http://russianembassyprotest.wordpress.com>

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<sup>1</sup> UNAIDS (2010) *UNAIDS Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic 2010* [http://www.unaids.org/globalreport/Global\\_report.htm](http://www.unaids.org/globalreport/Global_report.htm) [accessed 17 November 2011].