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ZCLDN hosts International Day against Drug Abuse in Mutare

MUTARE: The Zimbabwe Civil Liberties and Drug Network (ZCLDN) on July 06 held colourful commemorations to mark the belated International Day of Drug Abuse and illicit Trafficking at the Queen's Hall in Mutare, Manicaland province.

The event, which ran under the theme: **Listen first: - Listen to children and youth, is the first step to help them grow healthy and safe,** had Manicaland Resident Minister, Senator Monica Mutsvangwa as the guest speaker.

Other invited guests were the Manicaland provincial administrator, Mr Edgar Seenza, a representative from the Ministry of Health and Child Care, Ms Nezandonyi, Ministry of Youth Affairs official, Mr Lenin Mukwindidza and Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education official Mr Panganai Madanha.

Also in attendance were the ZCLDN vice board chairperson,

Sister Sandra Mapa, ZCLDN director, Wilson Box, People who use Drugs, teachers, youths and hundreds of pupils from Mutare urban schools.

In her address, Minister Mutsvangwa said illicit drugs had become a menace the world over and Zimbabwe was not spared.



Minister Mutsvangwa addressing guests

"Illicit Drugs are a menace the world over. Most young people have become victims of this scourge

due to the availability of the big sharks – who are the drug traffickers. As a nation, we should put our minds together to overcome this challenge," she told the packed audience.

The minister said on June 26 every year, Zimbabwe joined millions of activists in the world to make its voice heard as part of the global **Support: Don't Punish Campaign.**

"The campaign is calling on governments to put an end to the expensive and counter-productive war on drugs. The war on drugs has failed to reduce drug use or supply. We know that this war is unwinnable and unjustifiably expensive and has driven HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and hepatitis," she said.

She said most successful actions would be to promote more effective and humane approaches - such as compulsory drug rehabilitation and treatment for those who are drug dependent taking into consideration our socio-economic and cultural standing today.

“Our actions will work best when they are tailored to suit our local needs such as harm reduction, prioritizing the health and welfare of people who use drugs and their families and communities,” she said.

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Part of Minister Mutsvangwa’s speech at the International Day against Drug Abuse commemorations organised by the Zimbabwe Civil Liberties and Drug Network at the Queen’s Hall in Mutare on July 06

Today as Manicaland, we meet to commemorate a belated International Day of Drug Abuse and illicit Trafficking under the theme:

Listen first: - Listen to children and youth, is the first step to help them grow healthy and safe.

As a country, we are worried about this trend as many lives have been lost.

Illicit Drugs are a menace the world over. Most young people have become victims of this scourge due to the availability of the big sharks – who are the drug traffickers. As a nation, we should put our minds together to overcome this challenge.

The heightened risks faced by illicit drug and substance abuse dependent people can no longer be ignored. Drug and substance abuse has become a household problem in Zimbabwe and the world over.

June 26th is the United Nations “International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking” and Zimbabwe joins millions of activists in the world to make its

voice heard as part of the global **Support: Don’t Punish Campaign**. It is a global advocacy campaign to raise awareness of the harms being caused by current drug policies. The campaign is calling on governments to put an end to the expensive and counter-productive war on drugs.

The most successful action would be to promote more effective and humane approaches - such as compulsory drug rehabilitation and treatment for those who are drug dependent taking into consideration our socio-economic and cultural standing today.



Minister Mutsvangwa (centre) poses for a group photo

Our actions will work best when they are tailored to suit our local needs such as harm reduction, prioritizing the health and welfare of people who use drugs and their families and communities.

Our aim today is to raise awareness to equip the populace with the necessary skills and knowledge to lead healthy and safe lives. Instead of criminalizing people who use

drugs, we should be offering services that address any health and social problems that they may have, and respect their human rights. The tide is turning and we feel there is need for the country to reform drug policies and repair the damage.

The “**Global Day of Action**” is a public show of force for drug policy reform. What then compounds our problem is that the country does not have a population size estimate of people who use illicit drugs. This is an urgent challenge which needs to be addressed.

According to anecdotal evidence on the ground, a large percentage of our youths are hooked on dangerous drugs. According to local health experts, 50% of these youths are admitted to mental institutions.

This situation has been compounded by the fact that our drug policy criminalises drug users. This situation leads to the country losing essential human capital which should be working productively for the development of Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe needs a policy that rehabilitates and treats drug dependent people rather than incarcerate them.

As a nation, we hope we shall team up together and recognize that drug dependent people need our support in as far as rehabilitation and counseling are concerned. By punishing them without rehabilitation, we are killing our society, for drug use disorders are preventable and treatable.

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Queen's Hall Commemorations in Pictures



Figure 1. Part of the crowd that attended the event.



Figure 3. Diamond Kid entertaining the crowds at Queens Hall in Mutare



Figure 5. ZCLDN Director Wilson Box giving opening remarks



Figure 2. Minister Mutsvangwa with upper six students from Sakubva High 1.



Figure 4. A drug user giving a testimony.

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