

# SOLIDARITY THAT CANNOT BE CONFINED



SUPPORT. DON'T PUNISH  
2020 GLOBAL DAY OF ACTION  
SUMMARY REPORT



# ***Solidarity that cannot be confined:***

## **The Support. Don't Punish 2020 Global Day of Action**

November 2020

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**Support. Don't Punish** is a global, decentralised and grassroots-centred initiative that mobilises communities targeted by and resisting repressive drug policies. Under a common banner, we promote **harm reduction and drug policies that prioritise health, well-being and human rights.**

The campaign seeks to raise the profile of harm reduction and non-punitive responses to drug-related challenges by strengthening communities' mobilisation capacity, opening dialogue with policy-makers, and raising awareness among the media and the public.

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Stickers with the campaign's message in Indonesian.  
Photo by: Lingkar Ganja Nusantara Makassar

Photo by: PULS, Moldova



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## KEY MESSAGES OF THE CAMPAIGN

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The drug control system is broken and in need of reform.

People who use drugs should not be criminalised.

People involved in the drug trade should not face harsh or disproportionate punishments.

The death penalty should never be imposed for drug offences.

Drug policy should focus on health, well-being and harm reduction.

Drug policy budgets need rebalancing to ensure health and harm reduction-based responses are adequately financed.

## HUMAN RIGHTS AND DIGNITY

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The latest UNODC World Drug Report estimates that the number of **drug-related deaths reached 585,000 in 2017**. That's over 65 deaths every hour.

Most of these deaths are related to overdose and untreated hepatitis C, which speaks volumes of the **multiple health crises at the heart of drug-related harm**.

**Only 1%** of people who inject drugs lives in countries where basic harm reduction services are within adequate reach.

Moreover, these tragic numbers do not account for the trail of pain and death resulting from other forms of **violence fuelled by the "war on drugs": disappearances, police and extra-judicial killings, death penalty executions, arrests, incarceration, lack of access to controlled medicines**, among many others.

These harms and these deaths disproportionately impact communities already targeted by intersecting forms of oppression. And they can be reduced and prevented through responses that prioritise health and welfare.

These include diverse, effective and accessible harm reduction initiatives and services that respond to community needs.

**For the last eight years**, Support. Don't Punish campaigners across the globe have mobilised with this purpose, advocating for drug policies and narratives that centre human rights and dignity. For the benefit of all in our communities.

# 2020 GLOBAL DAY OF ACTION IN NUMBERS

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**288**

events worldwide

**239**

participating cities

**90**

participating countries

**110**

media items in 40 countries

**29+**

high-reach personalities engaged in 14 countries

**37,208**

combined following on social media accounts

# BUILDING THE RESPONSE THAT OUR COMMUNITIES DESERVE

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## A COLLECTIVE CALL FOR CHANGE

*The Support. Don't Punish Global Day of Action*

For the last eight years, efforts by Support. Don't Punish campaigners have materialised with great dedication around a **Global Day of Action**, observed annually on 26 June.

This day is also the the *United Nations' International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking*. Historically, this date has been used by governments to showcase drug control "achievements" in coercive terms that have no positive impact on communities' well-being.

From grandstanding declarations of war, to burning displays of seized drugs, and even public trials where people criminalised for drug offences are sent off for execution, the gruesome theatrics of the "war on drugs" glorify violence and punishment over human dignity and rights.

To shift the day's narrative and advance effective, achievable solutions to drug-related challenges, every year, an increasing number of campaigners in hundreds of cities worldwide join this unique, diverse show of force for change.

This brief report showcases and summarises our collective efforts around the 2020 Support. Don't Punish Global Day of Action.

“  
*Opposing the gruesome theatrics of the “war on drugs”, campaigners propose effective, achievable solutions that centre rights and dignity*  
”

”

## LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND

*A shared vision of caring, supportive societies*

A **wide range of actions and powerful displays of solidarity** have taken place this year both in person and, adapting to the realities of a global pandemic, virtually.

Across the globe, from Argentina, to Indonesia to South Africa, the 2020 Global Day of Action saw activists organise to **ensure no one was left behind** in response to the emergencies caused by the COVID-19 situation, which has been devastating for people in situations of vulnerability.

Campaigners also put great effort in creating events that favoured **building bonds within and between communities**, with heart-warming examples in **Mexico, Ukraine, Pakistan and Spain**.

As in previous years, and perhaps more markedly than ever, **the role of the arts has been central**. Movie screenings, **poster competitions** and **spoken word** pieces marked a Global Day of Action brimming with creativity in times of great challenge.

Bridging community needs and government responses, many of the events opened and consolidated **dialogue with policy-makers** through public debates and forums in **Cameroon, Honduras, North Macedonia** and beyond.

The ingenuity and dedication of Support. Don't Punish campaigners also translated into a substantial amount of **media attention and coverage** across all continents, amplifying the reach of our mobilisation.

# CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

## CAMPAIGNING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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### RESISTING A PAINFUL YEAR

*A pandemic upon pandemics*

The Global Day of Action this year came at a time when populations already targeted by the “war on drugs” and intersecting forms of oppression had to face the burdens and perils of a growing COVID-19 pandemic.

The negative consequences of pre-existing conditions related to **inadequate health and welfare systems** (which fuel the HIV, hepatitis and overdoses crises), **unsustainable economies** (and the resulting poverty and inequality) and **neglectful political institutions** have been more visible than ever.

For populations targeted by the “war on drugs” and, in particular, for people who use drugs, the knock-on effects on existing situations of vulnerability and precariousness have been dramatic: **Disruptions in the supply of drugs**, including of essential medicines, such as methadone; **restrictions in access to harm reduction services**, including access to sterile equipment and needle and syringe programmes; **physical distancing guidelines**, which lead to more people using drugs alone; **increased surveillance and violence by police forces**; and many others have tested the resilience of our communities and compounded risks.

### CAMPAIGNERS UNDETERRED

*Solidarity that cannot be confined*

Navigating these situations as well as the constraints in access to the public space and to decision-makers has been difficult for campaigners worldwide.

However, the crisis also led activists to rethink the way they organise and **apply their creativity to their work**. IDPC, as the campaign’s central hub, supported these efforts via a **Bank of Ideas for Mobilisation under COVID-19** and advice at the **pre-Day of Action webinar**, in May 2020.

Activities that involved public gatherings, outreach programmes and public events had to be **adapted to the new constraints** – moving online, using new technologies, restricting the number of attendees, implementing a host of safety measures.

While the situation posed obvious challenges, the pandemic has put into sharp relief the **importance of engaging and empowering communities in the response**.

Grassroots initiatives demonstrated that they can react quickly and reach those who are **often neglected by formal institutions**, making sure that nobody is left behind and contributing to **better health outcomes for all** in an incredibly difficult situation.



*Women activists from Dar es Salaam prepare to distribute basic hygiene and goods to those in need.  
Photo by: SALVAGE*



*'Time for a new normal' - The EuroNPUD network urges authorities to keep beneficial adaptations to service provision. Design by: @Maligneando / Metzineres*

## WE CANNOT DO IT ALONE

*"Growing the bubble" through coalitions*

The unique challenges of organising in the time of COVID-19 has also allowed campaigners to extend their usual circles of collaboration and influence, and **build coalitions** within and between targeted communities and social movements.

A wonderful example of how coalition-building has flourished this year is highlighted by the **European Network of People who Use Drugs (EuroNPUD)**, who stepped up as a powerful campaigning hub, utilising a rapid, multi-lingual partnership response to COVID-19.

EuroNPUD delivered their *Time For A New Normal* campaign for Support Don't Punish Day and supplemented funding for their network's Global Day of Action projects.

The campaign responded optimistically to the advocacy gains that have been secured

in light of COVID-19, including rapid access to and longer-term take-home doses of opioid agonist therapy (OAT / OST) medication; more flexible and accessible forms of support; the empowerment of peer-led harm reduction initiatives, such as peer-to-peer naloxone distribution; and the provision of housing for street-based people.

EuroNPUD commissioned a poster based on the key messages, which has been translated to German, Estonian, Russian, Portuguese and more!

Intercambios Asociación Civil (Argentina) has also responded to these trialling times by building alliances through the **#EstarEn-LaDistancia** (*Together whilst distant*) campaign.

Over 70 different organisations joined this social media campaign, which used audio-visual materials to raise awareness about the challenges faced by people who use drugs during the pandemic, and to bring the gaps in provision to the attention of the public opinion and political and health authorities.

Summing up these efforts, a declaration was produced and endorsed by 133 organisations and individuals!

The #EstarEnLaDistancia campaign had an important media impact, with some 15 news outlets reporting the initiative positively.

**“ We are particularly proud of having brought people from different corners of the globe together, and create connections beyond borders, from Argentina, to Germany to South Africa ”**

*Amy Romanello, Youth Organiser, Students for Sensible Drug Policy - Germany*

## DON'T DEFLATE, INNOVATE!

*Unleashing creativity to defy all odds*

The obstacles discussed above also led activists to let their creativity soar, including in virtual spaces.

The campaign saw all sorts of innovations, including digital advocacy initiatives from **Quezon City (the Philippines)** to **La Paz (Bolivia)**; art competitions in **Brazil** and **Pakistan**; trans-continental social media campaigns; and collective online letter-writing in Ukraine.

An example of crisis-responsive creative solutions came from **NoBox Philippines** (case study below). With support from the **Women and Harm Reduction International Network**, NoBox designed **Caligtangan**, an immersive 'choose-your-own-adventure' game inspired by the stories and testimonies of women incarcerated in the Philippines.

The **Paradigma** youth coalition hosted a global **24/7 decentralised e-conference**, the first of its kind, with dozens of youth-led sessions on burning drug-related issues. This space free from stigma and discrimination involved dozens of young people from across the globe, a unique opportunity to share, connect and strategise together.



*Street art project by South Asian Women Empowerment and Gender Equality in Sarghoda (Pakistan)*



*Submissions to poster art competition in Brazil by É de Lei, Cultive, Escola Livre de Redução de Danos, PBPD, ABRASCO, Pessoal do Fatoeste, Renfa, Rede Reforma*



*Team members distributing masks at deprived neighbourhoods of Yaoundé, Cameroon. Photo by: ACDRD.*



The Metzineres team at their drop-in centre, La VidAlegre, in Barcelona. Photo by: Metzineres

## SISTERWUD: WOMEN WHO USE DRUGS BUILDING LOCAL SUPPORT

**2020 Global Day of Action in Catalonia**  
*Small grants programme highlight*

Metzineres, the first integrated harm reduction programme exclusively for women and gender non-conforming people, has taken part in the Support. Don't Punish Global Day of Action in Catalonia since the project's foundation, in 2017.

Metz's activity for this year aimed at reinforcing bonds between programme participants and the neighbours of El Raval, where

Metzineres' drop-in centre is located, in downtown Barcelona.

The Juan Andrés agora, a plot of land reclaimed from dereliction by the locals, became a space to share ideas about the value of Metzineres, both for participants and the local community.

In a move that reflects the resourcefulness of Metzineres, programme participants became reporters during the event, making



short video interviews that fed into a video feature documenting the Global Day of Action experience.

Aura, who coordinated the activity, explains a key goal of the activity was to challenge prevailing narratives on women who use drugs: '[When it comes to drugs,] there is a lot of talk about *problems*; we wanted to show what *support* looks like.'

While the neighbours of the drop-in centre had been highly cautious when Metzineres was first set up, the COVID-19 pandemic put into sharp relief everyone's interdependence, and offered an opportunity to strengthen bonds of trust and solidarity.

By fostering dialogue and sharing experiences with the local community,

Metzineres is de-constructing and undoing decades of stigma and discrimination directed at people who use drugs and in situations of vulnerability. And making it clear that kinder, respectful, more effective and empowering responses to drug-related challenges are possible and achievable.

The enthusiasm of the Global Day of Action had a scent of *paella* (a popular celebratory dish), as huge pans were prepared for the documentary's première. The meal was a way to thank the neighbours and create yet another opportunity to build a sense of community.

This was the perfect occasion to build bridges, said Aura. 'The Global Day of Action is one of the few moments in the year when allies from across Catalonia come to Barcelona and gather around an internationally recognised action. The Day creates space to do something positive for the community, as the whole world is listening. And we seize the moment to say:'

**“ We are not victims, we are revolution! ”**  
Aura Roig, Director, Metzineres



The community of Metzineres and neighbours watching the first screening of the documentary. Photo by: Metzineres

# REPRESSION IS NOT THE SOLUTION

## THE CAMEROONIAN ASSOCIATION FOR HARM REDUCTION RELATED TO DRUG USE AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE (ACRDR) IS BUILDING ALTERNATIVES

### 2020 Global Day of Action in Cameroon Small grants programme highlight

The early adoption and expansion of the Support. Don't Punish campaign in Cameroon owes itself to the tenacity of a host of organisations and community-led networks, such as Empower Cameroon and PEP Sans Frontières, just to name a few.

This year, the Association Camerounaise pour la Réduction Des Risques liés à la consommation des drogues auprès des jeunes (ACRDR) joined the campaign's global efforts with a number of public events.

First up, on 20 June, ACRDR organised a public debate to build common ground with people who might have never heard of drug policy reform or harm reduction: 'Repression: Is it the solution?'

The conversation took place in Yaoundé, the country's capital, and saw the participation of people who use drugs and public authorities, including the National Commission for Human Rights and Freedoms, the National Committee for the Fight Against Drugs, the Ministry of Public Health and the Town Hall.

The week of activities concluded with an open fair organised on 26 June in the city of Douala, at the David Dagobert Fampou Stadium, near the New Bell prison.

Between these two major events, ACRDR organised the distribution of masks, sanitary materials and meals to people who use drugs and live on the streets.



*Mélanie, pictured in the middle says, the campaign's grant has allowed ACRDR to significantly boost its influence, particularly with decision-makers.*  
Photo by: ACRDR

ACRDR is an initiative co-led by people who use drugs and one of its goals is to foster connections within the community. The organisation's embeddedness in the community allowed it to adequately and swiftly respond to the challenges posed by the pandemic.

Mélanie Bébégue, who leads ACRDR, explains how this close relationship with the community allowed ACRDR to offer timely support, especially to those experiencing situations of high vulnerability:



*Working directly with communities most affected by the “war on drugs” and intersecting forms of oppression means ACRDR is better placed to respond to their needs and to better advocate for sustainable change. Photo by: ACRDR*

‘We are in contact with people who have no means to clean, no access to water, no ways to disinfect; and the government doesn’t seem to care. We know them, their stories, how they get by; because we visit them every Thursday and have honest conversations about what they are experiencing and what their needs are.’

ACRDR’s experience mobilising for the Global Day of Action highlights the importance of the campaign for young and developing initiatives rooted in the community.

Mélanie shared that ACRDR was only able to formally register last year and, despite the importance of its purpose, has struggled to find support from funders.

Although Mélanie has been able to leverage her own personal and professional connections to build bridges and create platforms for the voices of people who use drugs,

ACRDR’s work is mostly voluntary and limited by the lack of funds.

The Support. Don’t Punish Global Day of Action grant was their first. She says the campaign’s grant has transformed the ACRDR’s relationship with local stakeholders. ‘On a personal level, it has made our efforts and hard work feel validated’.

“

***The Global Day of Action grant has put us on the map. On a personal level, it has made our efforts and hard work feel validated.***

*Mélanie Bebeque, ACRDR*

”

The grant, she says, has put them ‘on the map’. ACRDR is now in regular correspondence with media outlets and has been able

to promote the campaign's messages on two television channels and nine radio programmes.

The Global Day of Action event also led to a **collaboration with a local celebrity**, Maahlox, who has endorsed the goals of the campaign and joined Mélanie on radio appearances.

Another key highlight concerns the organisation's **engagement with public authorities**, in particular from the Ministry of Health.

The week of activities saw a dialogue start between the newly appointed Minister and community members. This is a *first* for com-

munity members involved in ACRDR, who were able to share their first-hand experiences of the country's drug policies and the challenges they face.

Mélanie says this would not have been possible without receiving a campaign grant. Alluding to the campaign's reputation, she adds: 'Without the financial support from the Support. Don't Punish campaign, and the activities organised as part of the Global Day of Action, we would have not been taken seriously. **There is clearly a need to continue engaging, and possibilities to do so, but if the funds are not available, then nothing will move.**'



Mélanie Bebegue (ACRDR) and Maahlox during a radio interview in Douala.  
Photo by: ACRDR

# NEWS FROM THE DRUG WAR FRONT

WRITING COMPETITION FOR WOMEN WHO USE DRUGS IN AUSTRALIA

2020 Global Day of Action in Canberra, Australia

“  
*It is time we take ownership of the narrative!*  
”

Natasa Nikolic, Programme Coordinator at CAHMA



News From the Drug War Front's call to action on CAHMA's social media channels

The Canberra Alliance for Harm Minimisation and Advocacy (CAHMA) is a peer-based group with a lineage that finds its roots in the very first community responses to the HIV epidemic in Australia.

The weekly radio show, *News from the Drug War Front*, is a CAHMA initiative, with support from colleagues in the entertainment industry.

For the 2020 Global Day of Action, the show, invited the women in their audience to share their life experiences in relation to drug policies and services, and the *war on women who use drugs*.

Each week, and in total confidentiality, the hosts selected two stories to be read on air. Each one of those stories was also rewarded with a cash prize.

This activity was supported by a grant from the Women and Harm Reduction International Network (WHIRIN), whose engagement and leadership in the Support. Don't Punish campaign has resulted in increased engagement and awareness of the specific challenges faced by women who use drugs.

This is not the first time CAHMA takes part in the Global Day of Action. Last year, they organised an art project featuring pieces produced by peers themselves, and exhibiting them in their community centre.



*News from the Drug War Front is a weekly community radio show by CAHMA. Poster by: CAHMA*

This year, says Natasa Nikolic, who led on the organisation of activities, ‘we wanted to do something more empowering and wide-ranging’.

Natasa says the idea for the activity came from the realisation of a glaring omission in terms of realistic representations of women who use drugs in mainstream media:

‘There is rarely a first-person point of view of women who use drugs; especially in the radio. We never hear real stories that authentically reflect the experiences of the source, the real problems, using the original words. It is time we take ownership of the narrative!’

As CAHMA also does advocacy for the rights of women who use drugs, they also quickly realised that these stories are precious input to inform research and strengthen their advocacy work.

The radio show’s audience also noted this, with local researchers offering to do a qualitative analysis of the submissions.

CAHMA is currently working on the next phase of the project.

Yet another positive impact came from the reaction by men in the community, who report the stories ‘opened their eyes in terms of having better understandings of the specific additional challenges faced by women who use drugs’.

The *multiplier effect* of the campaign’s small grants as a means to empower communities to mobilise effectively, and in their own terms, is reflected by the responses to the project.

Most of the weekly award winners, for instance, decided to donate their cash prize in order to ensure the programme continued to run and more stories were collected and shared.

Moreover, the project was able to run for 8 weeks longer than originally planned thanks to an anonymous donation from a community member!

Solidarity generates solidarity.



*A poster produced as part of the collaboration between WHRIN and CAHMA as part of the Support. Don't Punish campaign.*



*Street theatre performance in front of the Ukrainian parliament.  
Photo by: Всеукраїнське об'єднання людей з наркозалежністю (PUD.UA / VOLNA)*

## UKRAINIAN DRUG POLICY WITHOUT JOKERS

### A NATIONAL COALITION TO END CRIMINALISATION

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#### 2020 Global Day of Action in Ukraine

##### *Initiatives Programme highlight*

PUD.UA / VOLNA is the national Ukrainian network of people who use drugs and people living with addiction. The network exists to develop collective strength, respond to community needs and promote rights-affirming policies and practices that depart from harmful criminalisation and exclusion.

This year, VOLNA was the recipient of an award by the Support. Don't Punish **Initiatives Programme**, a novel funding facility for campaigning and advocacy work made pos-

sible thanks to the invaluable contribution of the Elton John AIDS Foundation (EJAF).

The Initiatives Programme supported six strategic, creative and collaborative work-plans by community-led organisations and allies building momentum toward the 2020 Global Day of Action.

VOLNA produced its work-plan from a situation analysis, identifying the most pressing issues for the community that involve gov-

ernment and parliamentary authorities, law enforcement officers, medical professionals and the press.

Their assessment, structured in spaces for peers to share lived experiences and stories, brought to the fore a common sense of frustration over the authorities' slow change, despite years of engagement.

From this collective weariness came the concept for the 2020 Initiatives Programme: 'Ukrainian Drug Policy without Jokers'.

Here, the *joker* symbolises the lack of genuine acknowledgement of responsibility by government officials and other authorities responsible for the implementation of drug policy.

This large-scale campaign was carried out nationally, as VOLNA provided support to local groups of people who use drugs in Belaya Tserkov, Cherkassy, Chernivtsi, Dnipro, Ivano-Frankivsk, Kharkov, Kiev, Kirovograd, Kryvyi Rih, Lugansk, Lutsk, Lviv, Mariupol, Odessa, Poltava, Slavyansk, Sumy, Zaporozhye and Zhitomir.

The Programme unfolded in three stages:

### CAMPAIGNING FOR FREEDOM

*Standing up to arbitrary arrests*

As the Initiatives Programme was being planned, two high-profile cases of illicit arrests in secessionist republics stood before the office of the Ombudsman: that of Andrey Yarovoy, who was finally released on 29 December 2019; and that of Natalya (Natasha) Zelenina, detained by authorities of the so-called *Donetsk People's Republic* on the grounds she was carrying buprenorphine, a common form of opioid agonist therapy.

VOLNA used regional flash mobs to raise awareness about the arrest and bring attention to the precariousness of people who use drugs and people enrolled in opioid

agonist therapy. These were seconded by a far-reaching social media campaign.

VOLNA also submitted written appeals to the Ombudsman, the Ministry of Health and the Police to urge their active involvement in efforts to free Natasha.

Natasha remains deprived of her liberty but VOLNA's advocacy led to an opening in channels of dialogue with the government in relation to the country's Drugs Strategy (which expires in 2020) and the drafting of the next one.

### EVENTS IN 25 REGIONS

*End punishment, affirm human rights,  
provide medical and social assistance*

The activities organised were incredibly varied, involved over 150 community representatives and all focused on demands to the government and, in particular, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, to follow UN advice and decriminalise people who use drugs.

In twelve of the regions, networks of people who use drugs were joined by initiatives from convergent movements (including people living with HIV, sex workers and service providers), strengthening a solidarity block against criminalisation.



*Collage of campaign materials. PUD.UA / VOLNA*



Activists in front of the Ukrainian parliament.  
Photo by: PUD.UA / VOLNA

## SETTING THE COURSE

*Open letter to decision-makers*

Fifteen organisations signed an open letter stating the demands of the drug user movement. These included the expansion of harm reduction services and the removal of criminal penalties for activities related to drug use, as well as other policies and practices that build solidarity, reduce harm and protect health and human rights. The letter was supported by a press release and media outreach.

## OPENING A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY

*Toward recognition and reform*

The activities organised by VOLNA have reinforced the community's capacity for mobilisation and engagement with decision-makers.

A powerful example is the decision of the Supreme Council (the Ukrainian parliament) to engage community members in a process of review of the current national drugs strategy and the drafting of the next one.

Parliamentarians from the sub-committee in charge of this process, as well as other members of parliament, have vowed to keep decriminalisation in the horizon, and achieve legal change before 2030. As well as to continue engaging community representatives in the policy-development process.

“

*I have been involved in organising and conducting the campaign four times already.*

*Until people who use drugs are decriminalised and their rights respected, I will not stop.*

Oleg Dymaretsky,  
PUD.UA/VOLNA

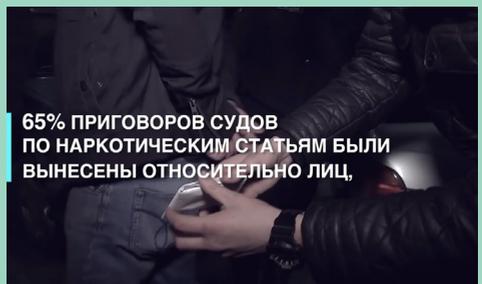
”

Oleg, who managed the Initiatives Programme work-plan, plans to raise the bar even higher next year.

Through VOLNA's campaigning and advocacy work, the network has become an indispensable voice representing the needs and interests of peers in Ukraine.

Their success at gaining access and recognition from decision-makers is long overdue, as well as emboldening.

Oleg is confident next year the campaign will be joined by the country's political class, including the Office of the President, the heads of the regional administrations and parliamentarians (particularly from the health sub-committee).



**65% ПРИГОВОРОВ СУДОВ  
ПО НАРКОТИЧЕСКИМ СТАТЬЯМ БЫЛИ  
ВЫНЕСЕНЫ ОТНОСИТЕЛЬНО ЛИЦ,**

*A video on the impact of criminal punishment against people who use drugs reinforced the campaign's message. Photo by: PUD.UA / VOLNA*



*The South African Network of People who Use Drugs (SANPUD) focused campaigning efforts toward responding to the needs of [formerly] street-based community members. Photo by: SANPUD*

## MUTUAL AID IN THE FRONT LINES

### EMERGENCY RELIEF & COMMUNITY BUILDING IN THE TIME OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

**2020 Global Day of Action in South Africa**  
*Initiatives Programme highlight*

The importance of community advocacy as a means to safeguard the health and welfare of people targeted by state violence and neglect is brought into sharp relief by the experience of the South African Network of People who Use Drugs (SANPUD) with the Support. Don't Punish campaign.

In November 2019, SANPUD was awarded a grant as part of **the campaign's Initiatives Programme**. The initial work-plan hinged on harm reduction trainings and a fascinating *PhotoVoice project*, with the goal of bringing to the fore personal stories narrated in the first person through the art of photography.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, however, SANPUD nimbly adapted their response to prioritise the most pressing needs of peers made particularly vulnerable by intersecting forms of oppression.

#### **NOT HOUSED, BUT WAREHOUSED**

*Responding to the emergency precipitated by forced relocations*

In response to the pandemic in Cape Town, the government authorities decided to relocate, often forcibly, the city's street-based population.

Movement restrictions were imposed and enforced, impeding people from leaving makeshift camps.

While opioid agonist therapy (OAT/OST) take-home doses are available in the city through the Step-Up Project, the programme's reach remains highly limited.

As a result, dozens of street-based people living with opioid dependence found themselves corralled in a foreign environment, without access to their regular channels of supply.

SANPUD quickly responded with a dual strategy. On one hand, reaching out to stakeholders to try to secure a safe supply of OAT and naloxone for the people in the city's Strandfontein camp.

And, on the other hand, mobilising the necessary resources to ensure symptomatic medication to alleviate the suffering associated with opioid withdrawal.

Acknowledging the gravity of the situation, and with the support of the **Elton John AIDS Foundation**, some of the Initiatives Programme funds were quickly reprogrammed to secure much-needed medication.

SANPUD collaborated with a specialist doctor to assist community members in the camp, some of whom had to be transported by ambulance services to the hospital for further care, given their dire state of health.

'Arriving on site to happy "Hi sister!" calls from residents who know that help has arrived was an uplifting experience', said MJ Stowe, Project Manager at SANPUD.

While the levels of need exceeded SANPUD's capacity for support, they also assisted people who were critically ill and of an advanced age. Yet another expression of the spirit of solidarity in community responses, in the near total absence of anything similar from official authorities.



*When the doctor arrived, some of the people experiencing withdrawal could not even stand up.*

*Photo by: Julie Mac Donnell*

Besides providing much-needed immediate relief to peers in need, this activity allowed SANPUD to show the power of grassroots mobilisation under the campaign, both to fellow community members and city authorities.

SANPUD has, since, continued to grow in strength, their work acknowledged by city and national authorities. Indeed, in a regional *first*, the network was **officially launched by the South African Deputy Minister for Social Development** in October 2020.

“ **Seeing people recover from withdrawal being able to eat and walk again filled us with joy.**

**Once recovered, many provided assistance to others who were only beginning to experience withdrawal.**

*MJ Stowe, Project Manager (SANPUD)* ”



*SANPUD's work prioritised responding to the urgent needs of street-based people who use drugs during the pandemic. Photo by: SANPUD*

## **KNOWLEDGE IS EMPOWERMENT**

### *Capacity-development trainings*

In line with SANPUD's belief that community members should have agency over their well-being, the network organised a series of learning resources to share harm reduction information.

These included: A webinar on the existing provision of harm reduction services in South Africa, how they had been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and responses to it, and the impacts on street-based people. And peer-led naloxone administration and overdose-prevention training sessions (in May and June), which included the provision of prescribed naloxone as well as information on how to obtain it through health-care professionals.

## **THE POWER OF STORY-TELLING**

### *The PhotoVoice project*

The third pillar of SANPUD's Initiative Programme was the PhotoVoice project.

SANPUD collaborated with South Africa's only 'housing-first' residence, which opened its doors on 1 June 2020, to reach out to people who use and/or have used drugs and invite them to use photography to illustrate how their drug use had impacted their lives, positively or negatively.

On 26 June 2020, for the campaign's Global Day of Action, StreetScapes and SANPUD hosted an exhibition of the photographs. Campaign goodies were distributed and the project's participants were able to share their stories with peers and attendees.

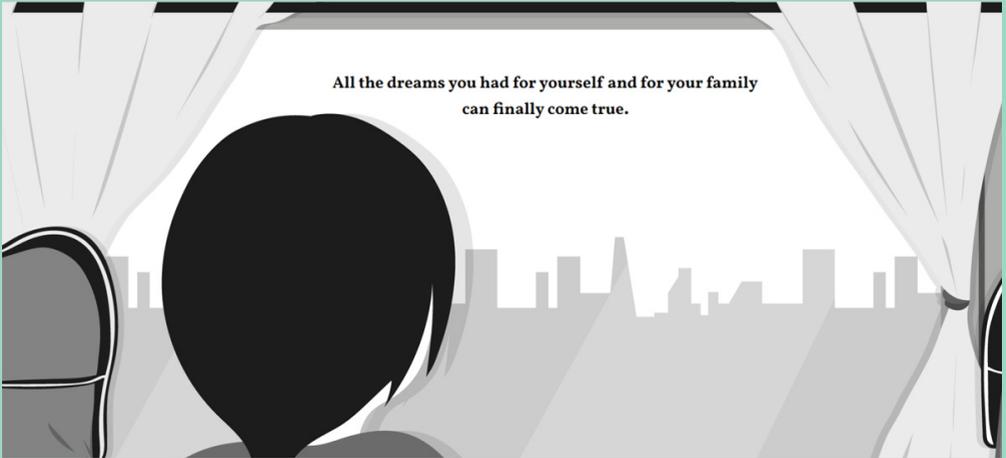
SANPUD's MJ Stowe said the space was an opportunity to make visible the complexity of the lived experiences of people who use drugs.

In a country where drug policies are anchored both in prohibitionist laws and the legacy of apartheid and racism, the PhotoVoice project offered an antidote to caricaturisation, instead placing real, individual, nuanced, experiences at the centre.

SANPUD and StreetScapes expect to recreate the exhibition in new spaces once the emergency of the pandemic subsides.



*A participant in the PhotoVoice project and her family. Photo by: SANPUD*



All the dreams you had for yourself and for your family  
can finally come true.

*Still from Caligtangan: An interactive story. By NoBox Philippines*

## **VIRTUAL STORIES, REAL LIVES**

### **SHARING THE IMPACT OF INCARCERATION ON WOMEN CRIMINALISED FOR DRUG OFFENCES**

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#### **2020 Global Day of Action in the Philippines**

Based in Quezon City, the most populous city in the Philippines, NoBox gave its first steps as a residential centre. While it continues to provide services, anchored in harm reduction, their work has grown research and advocacy arms that mobilise for drug policies that respect everyone's inherent dignity.

NoBox joined the Support. Don't Punish campaign for the first time six years ago and, since then, has delivered innovative work-plans that build bridges and fight divisive narratives on people involved in informal drug markets.

NoBox usually starts planning activities at the beginning of each year, to maximise impact and mature creative ideas.

This year, their plan was to build on their ongoing projects on the impact of incarceration on women criminalised for drug offences.

Adapting to the realities of COVID-19, and with support from WHRIN, the idea transformed into *Caligtangan*, a 'choose-your-own-adventure' online story inspired by documented experiences of women incarcerated in the Philippines.

The web-based interactive story allows visitors to gain a better understanding of the lives of women incarcerated for drug offences.

Countering both demonising and disempowering narratives, the online application takes visitors for a journey that allows them to see how criminalised women's lives and choices are heavily mediated by intersecting forms of

We want to write the story  
with you. Stay tuned!



What is your favorite  
comfort food/ulam  
paired with rice?



Comment below  
and tag a friend!

To Caligtangan



*A promotional post building interest in Caligtangan.  
By: NoBox Philippines*

trinkets', an exhibition of every-day objects that become 'luxury items' for women deprived of their liberty. These include hygiene supplies, comfort food and devices to communicate with family.

The idea was refashioned into online 'teasers' featuring the objects, designed to build interest in Caligtangan while starting to familiarise audiences with the hardships experienced by incarcerated women.

This social media campaign was supplemented with links to research papers and reports, including by NoBox, which is involved in research projects in this area with the University of the Philippines Diliman.

The promotion of Caligtangan reached over 5,000 people and the online resource is expected to transform perspectives and build solidarity way beyond its launch.

NoBox is currently working with a local online magazine writing an article about the project, which the organisation is aiming to translate into local languages.

oppression and exclusion, which are heightened and worsened by imprisonment.

NoBox's resourcefulness shines through the social media promotion campaign that preceded the release of Caligtangan.

Originally, before the pandemic emergency, the organisation was planning a 'museum of

# PHOTO PROJECT

## AN EVER-GROWING PHOTO PETITION

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The Photo Project is a key component of the Support. Don't Punish campaign. As an ever-growing, open, photo petition with over 10,000 entries to date, the Photo Project showcases the breadth of this global effort.

Snapshots feature advocates, community members, government and UN officials, celebrities, and a long etcetera - all united under a clear, universal, shared message: Support. Don't Punish.

If you wish to add your photo to the list, please do not hesitate to send them to [campaign@idpc.net](mailto:campaign@idpc.net).

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*The one and only, Elton John!*



*Photo booth in Avignon. Photo sent by: Groupe SOS*



*Activists join the Photo Project in Benin. Photo sent by: Perle Sociale ONG*



*Photo sent by: PREKURSOR, Poland*



Photo sent by: Sindh Green Development Organisation (SGDO), Pakistan



Photos by: Milestones Foundation, Nigeria.



Photo sent by: BARO Brukaranhörigas Riksorganisation, Sweden

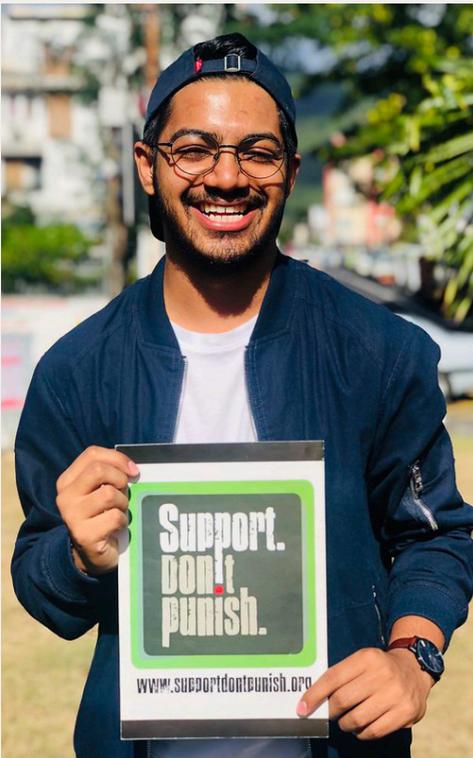


Photo sent by: Rajeev, Mauritius



Photo sent by: Madres de Plaza de Mayo, Argentina



Photo sent by: ACEID, Costa Rica



Photo sent by: Middle East and North Africa Network of People who Use Drugs (MENANPUD)



Photo sent by: Prashant Sharma, SDUF, India



Photo sent by: AIDES, Rennes, France



Photo sent by: Get the TEA (Testing, Education, Advocacy), Canada



Photo sent by: Children's Education Fund, Sierra Leone

# ADVANCING THE END OF THE “WAR ON DRUGS” OUTCOMES FROM THE 2020 GLOBAL DAY OF ACTION

## HIGH AND SUSTAINED ENGAGEMENT

*Mobilising for harm reduction, against the odds*

The pandemic was incredibly disruptive but not paralysing. With the sustained support of donors, and assistance and encouragement from IDPC and other campaign ‘hubs’, Support. Don’t Punish campaigners quickly adapted to navigate the challenges of mobilising during a global pandemic.

Through 288 events in 239 cities of 90 countries, campaigners sought to leave no one behind, bringing attention to the needs of people who use drugs and other populations targeted by the “war on drugs”.

This sustained engagement was, and continues to be, crucial to respond to immediate challenges in relation to government responses to the pandemic, and to strengthen the foundations of sustainable, rights-affirming, alternatives to punitive drug policies.

“

***26th of June was seen in Lithuania as International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking. Now, more and more people know it as Support. Don’t Punish day, which we think is a great achievement!***

***We are also proud of creating partnerships with government institutions, which for the last three years felt almost impossible to do.***

*Representative from Yauna Banga, Lithuania*

”

## INFLUENCE AND AWARENESS

*Shifting public opinion, undoing stigma*

With over 100 media hits in 40 countries and 30 expressions of support by high-reach personalities, influencers and state officials, the 2020 Global Day of Action excelled at reclaiming the commemorations of 26 June.

For too long, media messages have been dominated by outdated discourses prioritising retributive violence and punishment. One of the most successful impacts of the campaign over the last eight years has been to shift the dial, through sustained, visible, networked global activism.



*SSDP Ghana representatives in one of their five media appearances discussing drug policy reform.*

*By: SSSDP Ghana*

## STRENGTHENING BONDS OF SOLIDARITY

*People power to empower people*

The Support. Don’t Punish campaign recognises that punitive drug policies fuel and feed off structures of oppression that divide our communities and marginalise people who are unfairly deemed undesirable.

Campaigners contest this unequal access to services, health and welfare, which is det-

“

*We have new activists, volunteers, partners from human rights organisations, the media, and National Councils. And built a supportive relationship with UNAIDS.*

*Other communities are also supporting our cause, such as people living with HIV, LGBT people and NGOs working to support formerly incarcerated people.*

*PULS, Republic of Moldova* ”

rimental to society as a whole. We mobilise to ensure everyone can fully participate in thriving, fair and sustainable communities.

Achieving this objective requires creating conditions for the empowerment of communities pushed toward situations of vulnerability.

This is why the campaign prioritises the provision of means of mobilisation for community-led initiatives, as well as projects that build bridges between communities targeted by the “war on drugs”.



*In Warsaw, Social Drug Policy Initiative (SIN) organised a demonstrative drug checking workshop, followed by a demonstration march.*



*Representatives of Labyrinth (Kosovo), explain the need to reform punitive drug policies to ensure the success of harm reduction interventions.*

This year, over half of the campaign’s funds in support of campaigning and advocacy activities were attributed to community-led initiatives, a record that we aim to continue to build upon.

Through our feedback processes, campaigners have regularly raised the importance of this financial and in-kind support.

Many organisations who mobilise with the Support. Don’t Punish campaign start out small; most are located in the Global South. The campaign’s mobilisation grants support communities capacity to affirm their own rights and propose change that makes sense to them. This grassroots support has deeply transformative impacts.

For some campaigners, receiving funding from a globally-recognised initiative makes their work more credible in the eyes of local officials, promoting participation and accountability.

The Global Day of Action has also been crucial to bring people-centred, first-person narratives into the public sphere, countering often alienating mainstream accounts dominated by stigma and myth.

## CREATIVE SOLUTIONS

### *Navigating the pandemic situation*

The success of this year's mobilisation speaks volumes of the **resilience and commitment** of Support. Don't Punish organisers.

As prompted by the application process to the Global Day of Action small grants programme, many organisations had prepared **contingency plans** to adapt their activities to COVID-19 restrictions.

Over 40 events used **virtual spaces** (webinars, workshops, trainings etc.) to share information, develop capacity and raise awareness.

Noticing that access to internet could challenge community members, organisations

like BerLUN fund-raised and crowdsourced smart-phones and SIM cards, which were then donated to peers and community members to access training sessions and tailored update videos on social media.



*Supported by the campaign's Initiatives Programme, BerLUN produced video updates on harm reduction and drug policy for the community. Photo: BerLUN*

## BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

Amidst increasing pressure from reactionary anti-democratic forces, **strengthening campaigning and advocacy capacity of civil society and community networks is a matter of urgency.**

The challenges faced by campaigners worldwide are not dissimilar. On our own, they seem impossibly daunting. Campaigning together, they appear necessarily conquerable.

The Support. Don't Punish campaign materialises international solidarity in transformative, emboldening ways that centre communities targeted by the "war on drugs".

The campaign's Global Day of Action creates spaces and platforms for grassroots initiatives to do what they do best: **unleash and potentiate people power to contest punitive responses to drugs and advance sustainable alternatives based on care, compassion and the respect of everyone's inalienable human rights.**

In doing so, the Global Day of Action is unparalleled in energising a common and growing front of communities, activists, professionals of different sectors, artists, decision-makers and all manners of allies to **stand up for harm reduction under the umbrella of our shared dignity.**

**Together, our voices are louder, our collective message stronger, our capacity to make change unstoppable. Support. Don't Punish!**



*The Association for Humane Drug Policy (Norway) demonstrated in front of Parliament. Seven members of Parliament joined in.*

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## AN ECOSYSTEM OF SUPPORT

### A DECENTRALISED EFFORT

*The campaign's modus operandi*

The Support. Don't Punish is an international decentralised networked effort, contributed to by thousands of campaigners and hundreds of **local partner organisations** world-wide.

The **International Drug Policy Consortium** hosts the Support. Don't Punish campaign and acts as its main hub. As such, IDPC leads on global fundraising, capacity development and communication efforts, and provides material and in-kind support to campaigners across the globe.



*The IDPC Secretariat team joined the campaign's Photo Project for the 2020 Global Day of Action.*

### THE CAMPAIGN'S SISTER HUBS

*Championing our common cause worldwide*

IDPC is in regular dialogue with organisations that actively promote the campaign and contribute to the mobilisation of grass-roots groups, including through their own fundraising efforts.

These **sister hubs** often have a regional or thematic focus. Their commitment has been

crucial for the campaign's growth and many of the activities that have been mentioned above owe themselves to their unwavering dedication.

For this reason, an account of the 2020 Support. Don't Punish Global Day of Action would not be complete without acknowledging the fantastic work of sister hubs such as: the **Drug Policy Network South East Europe (DPNSEE)**, the Eurasian Network of People Who Use Drugs (ENPUD), the **European Network of People who Use Drugs (EuroNPUD)**, **Frontline AIDS** and the **PITCH Programme**, the **India HIV/AIDS Alliance**, the **Middle East and North Africa Harm Reduction Association (MENAHR)**, the **Women and Harm Reduction International Network (WHRIN)** and **YouthRISE**.

### CAMPAIGN DONORS

*Resourcing people power for harm reduction*

Last, but by no means least, IDPC is incredibly grateful to the campaign's donors, who provide absolutely essential, yet scarce, means for campaigners to challenge criminalisation and promote harm reduction.

IDPC has received dedicated campaign funds from the **Elton John AIDS Foundation**; the **PITCH Programme**, via **Frontline AIDS**; and the **Robert Carr Fund**. Important core support has also been received from the **Open Society Foundations**.

