

Dr Massimo Barra
Signing of MoU between UNODC and IFRC
Geneva 19 May 2011

Today's MoU represents both an achievement and a starting point.

It is an achievement resulting from a long path of mutual acquaintance initiated in 1989, when the Federation sent an advisor to the UNFDAC, former name of UNODC, in Vienna for two months.

Since then a lot of water has flowed under the bridge and the current ceremony marks the starting point of a more intense cooperation between our two Institutions.

Cooperation is one of the most recurrent - and probably abused - words in the world of the international relationships.

In this case we would like this cooperation to have a definite concrete objective: improving the quality of life of drug users.

In our globalised world no Institution is able to act alone.

In this cooperation, the UNODC brings its weight from being part of the UN system while the Federation, part of the International Movement of the RC/RC, brings the power of Humanity, with its peculiar auxiliary role to public authorities, veritable third pillar of the world, bridging the gap among Governments and civil society. We bring also the weight of our capillarity in 186 countries. The Federation can disseminate its messages even to the most out-of-the-way village, thanks to its 13 million volunteers.

There are many things to do in the field of assistance in favour of drug users.

Many governments ignore reality, basing their antidrug activities on preconceived ideas.

Even international Institutions, for a long time, have developed policies based on fear, discrimination and the criminalisation of a phenomenon seen as a problem for judges, police, warders, customs officials, instead of a field of action for doctors, psychologists or social workers. But we know that repression only exacerbates stigma of DUs which can be reflected in what Mr Ban Ki Moon has recently stated "stigma will cause death, upon death, upon death" and, more modestly, as I have stated for many years "stigma kills".

But in these last years the atmosphere has changed and expressions such as "public health", "scientific evidences" and "humanitarian policies" are more and more used in the guidelines of most of the international Institutions working in this sector.

The recent positions expressed by the Federation, UNODC, UNAIDS, WHO and Global Fund are clear and do not permit misinterpretation.

This said, the scientific evidence-based strategies are bearing fruit. Harm reduction works. Governments can no longer refute the benefit of opioid substitution therapy as recommended by WHO, nor the containment of HIV via exchange of needles and other harm reduction activities. In this context, the Italian Red Cross/Villa Maraini, on behalf of Red Cross Red Crescent Societies, has developed model and practices that fully correspond to internationally accepted and

recommended strategies. Such approaches in line with harm reduction activities can only be further scaled up to worldwide reach if funding, commitment and support are guaranteed.

It is important to work in a way so that voices arising from the international community be heard everywhere.

To me, this is the ulterior motive of today's ceremony.

The RC/RC's voice is well respected and heard all over the world, during both peacetime and wartime. All parties feel represented and protected by our Movement.

Drug use provokes enormous suffering for millions everywhere.

Much of this suffering is not related to the effects of substances: it results, instead, from preconceived ideas and human evils, repressive and old-fashioned legislation as well as the complicity of doctors still attached to the violent psychiatric practices of the past.

Our Institutions can make the difference, promoting humanitarian policies on drugs which can dramatically improve the quality of life of millions.

This is our hope and that is why today's agreement will certainly be remembered in the future.

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