



EURASIAN HARM REDUCTION NETWORK



OPEN SOCIETY INSTITUTE
Public Health Program

Moscow AIDS Conference Blocks Drug Treatment Patients, Groups Charge

For Immediate Release

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Kiev, Ukraine, February 14, 2008—In advance of a regional AIDS conference in Moscow, nearly 90 health and human rights groups from 27 countries today petitioned a top health official to allow drug treatment patients to enter Russia with their medications.

Methadone and buprenorphine are banned for use in Russia, but they are prescribed worldwide to treat addiction to opiates such as heroin, and have been shown to be effective tools in HIV prevention and treatment efforts.

“Thousands of people throughout Eastern Europe and Central Asia use methadone and buprenorphine to overcome addiction and improve their lives,” said Vladimir Zhovtyak, East European & Central Asian Union of People Living With HIV (ECUO). “In order to create truly effective AIDS responses, we need the full participation of marginalized populations including drug user communities.”

The petition was organized by ECUO along with the All-Ukrainian Network of People Living With HIV/AIDS, the Eurasian Harm Reduction Network, the European Opiate Addiction Treatment Association, the Russian AIDS activist group FrontAIDS, the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union, the International Network of People Who Use Drugs, the South Eastern European-Adriatic Addiction Treatment Network, and the International Harm Reduction Development Program of the Open Society Institute.

The groups are calling on Russia to make exceptions to the ban and accommodate conference participants who are undergoing methadone or buprenorphine treatment in their home countries. The petition was delivered today to Russia’s Chief Sanitary Doctor, Gennady Onischenko, and conference organizers, including the International AIDS Society and officials with the United Nations and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

The Eastern European and Central Asian AIDS Conference (EECAAC) will be held in Moscow May 3-5. The meeting is being promoted as a leading forum for health experts and activists addressing the HIV pandemic. However, in a region where injection drug use accounts for more than 70 percent of cumulative HIV cases, many AIDS activists are former drug users who are undergoing methadone or buprenorphine treatment. These activists will be forced to choose between their personal health and participation in an important public health forum, say the groups.

“The Russian ban on methadone and buprenorphine, and the failure of global health leaders to address this issue directly, undermines the goals of the conference and the needs of people at risk for or living with HIV,” said Raminta Stuikyte of the Eurasian Harm Reduction Network.

Methadone and buprenorphine, which are on the World Health Organization’s Model List of Essential Medicines, are prescribed in many countries throughout the region, including Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan, among others.

The letter with full list of sign-on groups is online at:
http://www.soros.org/initiatives/health/focus/ihrd/news/petition_20080214