

To: Nursultan Nazarbayev
President of the Republic of Kazakhstan
Copy: Yelzhan Birtanov
Minister of Health of the Republic of Kazakhstan

26 June, 2018
№ 21-06/18-EHRA-05

Honorable President Nazarbayev,

We, the signed below, express our deep concern as to the threatened closure of the life-saving opioid substitution treatment (OST) program in Kazakhstan. OST has been recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO), the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the Joint UN Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) as the most efficient and effective healthcare measure to treat opioid drug dependence and is an essential measure to prevent the spread of HIV, to improve HIV treatment outcomes among people who use drugs, and to improve the quality of life of such people. OST is being implemented in more than 80 countries globally, including the USA, Canada, China, Iran, all member states of the European Union (EU), and in the majority of countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

Initiated in 2008, the pilot OST program in Kazakhstan was positively assessed by a number of international expert bodies and was found to be effective in the local context and recommended for scale-up throughout the country. Today, the OST program operates in 13 cities across all of Kazakhstan and is helping 320 clients to stop, or to significantly reduce, their drug use, to start HIV and tuberculosis treatment, and to return to productive social lives. In addition, most OST clients are employed or receiving professional training. Furthermore, the OST program has seen healthy children born to drug dependent mothers. OST literacy saves the lives of people with opioid dependence.

If the quality of services were to be improved, and its coverage increased to reach at least 20% of people with opioid dependence, the OST program would have an impact on the HIV epidemic and will increase life expectancy in Kazakhstan. However, rather than expanding OST services, a number of interest groups in Kazakhstan have initiated a campaign to have it closed, ignoring all the evidence of its positive effects¹, as well as international recommendations and the positive worldwide experience in providing OST services.

OST is a long-term treatment, and its interruption will most likely cause relapse to drug use among a large number of clients, resulting in new HIV infections, social isolation and renewed suffering of opioid dependent people and their families.

Your strong position in support of an effective national HIV response in Kazakhstan, and for access to OST services by those who need them, will be crucial to sustain the results of the Kazakhstan AIDS program and to ensure progress towards the international targets of Sustainable Development Goals.

With respect,

Anna Dovbakh, Executive Director, Eurasian Harm Reduction Association (EHRA)



¹ On 30 October 2017, Working Group initiated by the Ministry of Interior produced a Resolution with the conclusions that OST is effective in Kazakhstan and it should be continued with some improvements regarding the accessibility and the quality of services.

The list of organizations, supporting joint statement:

1. Harm Reduction International, Великобритания
2. International Drug Policy Consortium, Великобритания
3. Автономная некоммерческая организация Центр социальной помощи ЛУНА, Россия
4. Евразийская сеть людей, употребляющих наркотики
5. AFEW International, Нидерланды
6. NGO Juventas, Черногория
7. Montenegrin harm reduction network Link, Черногория
8. Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, Канада
9. White Noise Movement, Грузия
10. Unico, Кот-д'Ивуар
11. SOS eja, Кот-д'Ивуар
12. La relève, Кот-д'Ивуар
13. Foyer du bonheur, Кот-д'Ивуар
14. Youth rise ci, Кот-д'Ивуар
15. Aube nouvelle, Кот-д'Ивуар
16. Lumière du jour, Кот-д'Ивуар
17. Avega, Кот-д'Ивуар
18. Efed, Кот-д'Ивуар
19. Atia, Кот-д'Ивуар
20. Fraternité pour tous les peuples, Кот-д'Ивуар
21. Anonyme ci, Кот-д'Ивуар
22. Paroles autour de la santé, Кот-д'Ивуар
23. Harm Reduction Coalition, Соединенные Штаты Америки
24. Canberra Alliance for Harm Minimisation & Advocacy, Австралия
25. International Centre for Science in Drug Policy, Канада
26. The International Network of People who use Drugs (INPUD), Великобритания
27. CVO – Addiction Research Center, Нидерланды
28. “Young Wave”, Lithuania
29. Association Foyer du Bonheur, Cote d'Ivoire
30. Фонд содействия защите здоровья и социальной справедливости им. Андрея Рылькова, Россия
31. Эстонское Сообщество людей, использующих психотропные вещества, Эстония
32. Евразийская Женская Сеть по СПИДУ, Грузия
33. Благотворительная организация «Клуб «Свитанок», Украина
34. Автономная некоммерческая организация социальной поддержки населения „Проект Апрель“, Россия
35. Инициативная группа людей, потребляющих наркотики „Не анонимные“, Россия
36. Общественное объединение “Казахстанский фонд женщин, живущих с БИЧ”, Казахстан
37. Грузинская сеть людей, употребляющих наркотики, Грузия
38. НПО “Новый вектор”, Грузия
39. Bulgarian Methadone Treatment Association, Болгария
40. The Flemish Needle Exchange, Бельгия
41. Center for humane policy, Болгария
42. Društvo AREAL, Словения
43. НПО “Рубикон“, Грузия
44. INSERM, Франция
45. Общественная Организация "Апейрон", Таджикистан
46. Rights Reporter Foundation, Венгрия
47. Association PROI, Босния и Герцеговина

48. Lambeth Service User Council, Великобритания
49. Association "Margina", Босния и Герцеговина
50. HOPS-Healthy Options Project Skorje, Македония
51. ARAS - the Romanian Association Against AIDS, Румыния
52. Women for Health, Грузия
53. Alternative Georgia, Грузия
54. Respect Drug User Rights, Великобритания
55. The European Network of People Who Use Drugs, Великобритания
56. The John Mordaunt Trust, Великобритания
57. Associazione "L'isola di Arran" onlus, Великобритания
58. Brukarföreningen Stockholm (Stockholm Drug Users Union), Швеция
59. Сообщество людей, употребляющих наркотики, Молдова
60. «СВОИ Плюс», Таджикистан
61. ОФ "Альтернатива в наркологии", Кыргызстан
62. Italian Network for Harm Reduction (ITARDD), Италия
63. CASO, Португалия
64. Indonesian Harm Reduction Network, Индонезия