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**« Declaration on protecting public health by ensuring essential services in drug policy under austerity budgets (Athens Declaration) »**

We the representatives of States participating in the 73rd meeting of Permanent Correspondents of the Pompidou Group,

*Noting* that the global financial and economic crisis in Europe and the related austerity measures have already brought about and may imminently exacerbate challenges related to the health of the individual and of the population as a whole, as well as the cohesion of our societies;

*Noting with great concern* the changing patterns of drug use under circumstances of strict austerity measures, such as the possible risk of an earlier onset of drug use, the increasing prevalence of injecting use, relapses, risk taking, overdosing, particularly among vulnerable groups; the increasing incidence of poly-drug use, involving illicit and licit substances, the impact of such behaviours on public health as well as on criminality;

*Concerned that* the effects of economic crisis possibly result in discriminatory attitudes of society towards drug use and people who use drugs that undermine risk and harm reduction, drug treatment, social re-integration and the potential for recovery;

*Recognising* the need to better understand the effects of economic crises on overall drug use and drug policies, notably:

- The asymmetric impact of the crisis on certain population groups and societies ;
- The impact of the crisis on drug use, drug consumption patterns and related risks and harms, including drug dependence, overdose, infectious and other blood borne diseases;
- The impact of austerity measures and restructuring efforts on the overall health budgets and on drug related public expenditure;
- The consequences of resulting constraints on budgets of law enforcement agencies and overall drug supply reduction efforts, thus risking a potential increase in the availability of drugs;

- The impact of reduced demand reduction resources, which may affect availability of risk and harm reduction policies and measures and coverage for overall treatment and rehabilitation and reintegration services;

*Recalling* the obligations of States under the Council of Europe and United Nations Conventions to protect fundamental rights and freedoms, in particular the right to life and human dignity, the right to protection of health, the right to equitable access to quality health care services for all, the prohibition of any type of discrimination as well as the right of children to be protected from narcotic drugs and psychoactive substances;

*Recalling* the obligations of States under Art. 2 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and under Art. 4 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, to progressively realise the right to the highest attainable standard of health to the maximum of available resources.

*Bearing in mind* Resolution 1884 (2012) on Austerity measures – a danger for democracy and social rights, and Resolution 1946 (2013) on Equal access to health care of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe;

1. *Reaffirm our commitment to the following principles even in times of severe resource constraints:*

- Drug policy implementation should be guided by fundamental equity and quality standards and utmost respect for human rights;
- A balanced approach in drug policy should also be reflected in budgets available for supply reduction and demand reduction measures;
- Mutual assistance and cooperation at national and international levels are essential elements of drug policy implementation;
- Immediate action should be taken or intensified in cooperation with NGOs and civil society to ensure integrated quality care (from prevention through to recovery) is made available to vulnerable populations, thus protecting the individual and the society at large.

2. *Where necessary, appeal* to all actors in drug policy to initiate and support immediate political action to mitigate the impact of economic crises, particularly on the most vulnerable, and to guarantee broad coverage, accessibility and quality of essential services, despite budgetary constraints.

3. *Declare* our resolve to continue providing such comprehensive, integrated services as part of our national drug policies and safeguard against any type of discrimination. To achieve this:

- Where necessary, urgent action must be taken on the basis of indicators showing changes in the drug situation and its consequences. In some countries there is already

sufficient evidence that justifies action before a serious deterioration of individual and public health indices as well as loss of human life occurs;

- Evidence based best practices on optimizing cost effectiveness in policy implementation should be used to address pressing budgetary constraints. Innovative solutions to providing essential services at manageable costs should be encouraged and explored;
  - Drug policies at the national level should be implemented in cooperation with NGOs and the civil society, which can foster greater service integration, optimise economies of scale and achieve improved cost effectiveness.
4. *Commit* the Pompidou Group to work on this issue and to work towards its inclusion in the future work programme.
  5. *Call* on other international organisations and non-member States to support the Pompidou Group's in its efforts to mitigate the consequences of economic crises and resulting austerity measures, in particular by joining the Group's efforts to create safeguards against stigmatization and discrimination of people who use drugs.