



Malaysian AIDS Council's Health, Safety, Public Order report recommends good practices of Swiss drug policy to authorities

KUALA LUMPUR, 17 December 2014 – The mark of an effective drug policy is the way it treats people who use drugs as equal partners in its approach, implementation and enforcement such as the one demonstrated by Switzerland, remarked Malaysian AIDS Council at an event to disseminate Health, Safety, Public Order: A Photo Report on Swiss Drug Policy today.

The report discusses the findings of and lessons learned on the Swiss drug policy, as seen through the lens of the delegates of a study visit organised by Malaysian AIDS Council to Zurich, Switzerland and drug treatment facilities around the city in late August this year.

Zurich was chosen for its bold decision to undertake a multifaceted approach to drug treatment and control against the backdrop of an escalating twin epidemics of HIV and drugs where, during its peak in the 1980's, Switzerland recorded the highest new cases of HIV in Europe and people who use drugs could be found injecting in public.

“Switzerland has one of the most advanced drug policies in the world. By placing the health, well-being and protection of people who use drugs at the centre of the policy – as opposed to relying solely on strict law enforcement and compulsory treatment strategies – not only has the open injecting drug scene been completely overturned, drug-related crimes, young initiations into heroin use and incidences of infectious diseases such as HIV have also been significantly reduced,” explained Datuk Dr. Raj Karim, President of Malaysian AIDS Council in a statement.

Adopting the Four Pillars strategy covering treatment, harm reduction, prevention and law enforcement, Switzerland's comprehensive approach to drug issues addresses all factors contributing to the drug epidemic, including socioeconomic deficit which drug policies in many other countries fail to recognise.

Access to medicines and health services is a cornerstone of the Swiss drug policy. In Zurich, infrastructures such as Arud (an institution providing holistic drug treatment) and placement of medical professionals (physicians, psychiatrists and general healthcare workers) in remand centres (equivalent to police lockups in Malaysia) guarantee immediate access for people who use drugs to critical medicines such as antiretrovirals (for HIV treatment) and methadone (for opiate substitution therapy) well as psychiatric and psychological help, social services and assistance with employment.

Another distinctive feature of the Swiss drug policy is the establishment of a special governmental body called the SIP or Security, Intervention, Prevention, which in Zurich is composed of 70 social workers, ethnographers, and psychologists. Members of the SIP team are tasked to walk around the city everyday to resolve or mediate public order issues by

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approaching individuals respectfully and without stigma, and divert street-based drug users to voluntary healthcare services.

“Having studied the strengths of the Swiss drug policy, we recommend that the Government take it up as an example of good practices to guide our response to HIV and drug issues. Taking a leaf out of the Swiss drug policy’s book, we hope that law enforcement and drug control agencies as well as other relevant authorities would sustain and continue to support harm reduction and voluntary drug treatment services as we work towards reducing new HIV infections among people who use drugs even further,” Datuk Raj added.

Findings of the report were shared in conjunction with the first ever Universal Health Coverage Day observed on 12 December annually. Also present at the event was Rolf Ott, Deputy Head of Mission of the Embassy of Switzerland in Malaysia.

The Swiss drug policy study visit and report are key activities of Malaysian AIDS Council under the Asia Action on Harm Reduction, an ambitious three-year project that looks to improve the legal and policy environment affecting responses to HIV and drug use in Malaysia made possible through a European Union grant.

Delegates of the study visit comprised Member of Parliament Bagan Serai, YB Dr Noor Azmi Ghazali; Senior Private Secretary to Deputy Minister of Home Affairs, Datuk Wan Hamzah Wan Paie; Officer in Charge of Police District Seri Alam, Superintendent Abdul Samad Salleh; Berita TV9 Broadcast Journalist, Aminhayat Abd Rahim; Malaysian AIDS Council Policy Manager, Fifi Rahman and Policy Officer, Sarah Iqbal.

The report is available online and can be downloaded from this link: <http://bit.ly/1wE3msu>

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Malaysian AIDS Council

The Malaysian AIDS Council (MAC) was established in 1992 to serve as an umbrella organisation to support and coordinate the efforts of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working on HIV & AIDS issues in Malaysia. MAC works in close partnership with government agencies, the private sector and international organisations, to ensure a committed and effective NGO-led response to the HIV epidemic. In addition to providing nationwide coverage of HIV prevention, treatment, care and support services, MAC and its Partner Organisations serve as the common voice for communities most affected by HIV & AIDS in the country. Learn more at www.mac.org.my

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