

Headline	New roadmap to community services for Asian drug users		
MediaTitle	Daily Express (KK)		
Date	26 Sep 2015	Color	Black/white
Section	Nation	Circulation	25,055
Page No	12	Readership	75,165
Language	English	ArticleSize	249 cm ²
Journalist	N/A	AdValue	RM 513
Frequency	Daily (EM)	PR Value	RM 1,539



New roadmap to community services for Asian drug users

BANGKOK: Nine Asian countries, including Malaysia, adopted a new roadmap which aims to accelerate the transition towards evidence informed prevention, treatment and support services for people who use drugs.

The participants of the Third Consultation on Compulsory Centres for Drug Users (CCDU) which took place in Manila, Philippines recently recognised that current punitive approaches are failing and a paradigm shift from punitive laws and policies to voluntary community-based services is necessary.

The countries participating in the Third Consultation on Compulsory Centres for Drug Users were Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam, according to the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

Senior representatives of drug control, health and finance agencies attended the meeting organised by the UNODC, UNAIDS and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (Escap) in Manila recently.

UNAIDS and UNODC said in a statement that East and Southeast Asia is the largest market in the world for amphetamine type stimulants, while the consumption of heroin is also rising in the region.

They said that with 3.15 million people who inject drugs (PWID) in 2015, East and Southeast Asia account for about a quarter of all PWID worldwide.

About 1.65 million PWID were estimated to be living with HIV worldwide in 2013 and an estimated 29 per cent are living with HIV in South-west Asia, they said.

The HIV epidemic driven by the sharing of drug injecting equipment is among the fastest growing in the world. By sharing needles and syringes, a person is three times more likely to transmit HIV than through engaging in unsafe sexual intercourse,

they added.

The common response to the high prevalence of drug use in the region is the confinement of PWID in compulsory treatment and rehabilitation centres, they said.

They said that deprivation of liberty raises human rights concerns as there was no evidence that these centres represent a favourable environment for the treatment of drug dependency.

The participants agreed to transition to voluntary community-based services including treatment, through implementing a roadmap.

"The roadmap is a big step forward towards the full implementation of voluntary community based services for people who use drugs in Asia and the Pacific region," said Steve Kraus, Director of UNAIDS Regional Support Team for Asia and the Pacific.

Benjamin P. Reyes, Deputy Executive Director for Operations, Dangerous Drug Board, Quezon City, Philippines said that as there was no evidence on the cost-effectiveness of the compulsory centres, it made more sense to transition to voluntary community-based approaches.

"The need to transition is a response to the problem of drugs in our communities because it's evidence-based."

The roadmap identifies three pillars of action.

The first focuses on establishing national task-teams responsible for developing transition plans; the second encourages national reviews of policies restricting voluntary access to community-based treatment programmes and the third focuses on building the capacity of the health sectors and communities to provide voluntary services, including treatment.

Jeremy Douglas, UNODC Regional Representative in Southeast Asia and the Pacific welcomed the commitment of countries to implement the roadmap towards voluntary community based services for people who use drugs.