



UNITED NATIONS
Office on Drugs and Crime

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Video Message for Milan Meeting of
European Cities Against Drugs

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I regret that I am not able to join you today, but I want to express my support for your work and emphasize the important role that cities can play in drug control.

Drug control is so important and complex that it cannot be handled solely by governments. Drugs affect all parts of society. Therefore we all have a shared responsibility to keep them out of our communities, and help those vulnerable to addiction.

Consider the question of demand. Most demand for drugs comes from urban centers, for example the growing appetite for cocaine in some major Western European cities or the steady demand for heroin in some Eastern European cities.

Increasingly, cities are a sources of *supply* for illicit drugs. Coca and opium are grown far away and imported to Europe via long trafficking routes. But cannabis and synthetic drugs are being grown or cooked up just down the street - in labs, warehouses or even houses that have been completely transformed to maximize production.

The greatest challenge to drug control is in demand reduction. However successful we may be at eradicating illicit crops at their source, and intercepting drug shipments, until we address the root problem of addiction all other efforts will be in vain.

Drug abuse *can* be prevented and treated. But there are no short cuts. It takes a society-wide effort and a holistic approach.

Prevention and treatment are as much social issues as questions of law enforcement, particularly among people who – because of their personal, family, social and economic backgrounds – may be vulnerable to drug abuse.

To help young people make the right choices in life, it is important that they get a good start in life, and good guidance at home. Cities should support programmes to strengthen families, improve parenting skills, and reduce anti-social behaviour among youth.

Schools can help by teaching life-skills and discussing with young people the effects of drug use.

Specialists can help develop social and problem-solving skills – problematic families and children with behavioural problems should be engaged.

Health officials, the media, and community groups can educate people about the dangers of drugs – to family life; careers; and health.

Young people can reach out to their peers.

Community groups can provide young people with after-school activities like sport and the arts that enable them to spend their time in a fun, challenging and constructive way. I urge you to make the green spaces, sport facilities and playgrounds in your communities places where young people can feel safe and have fun, rather than feel threatened by drug dealers or delinquents.

The media should be involved, for example to explain the dangers of drug abuse rather than glamourizing the drug habits of celebrities. More effective communication strategies are needed to explain the dangers of addiction, especially to counter simplistic arguments about legalization.

Drug control in the city is not a political issue – public health and security transcend ideological differences. Cities that have long-term, coherent, and well-funded drug prevention strategies and that involve all stakeholders have been able to successfully control drug-related problems. Those that fail to invest the necessary political and financial resources get the drug problem that they deserve.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Drug addiction is a disease. It needs to be treated as such, as you would treat tuberculosis or AIDS.

At the moment, there are too many cases of ideology-based interventions, punishment instead of treatment, band-aids instead of cures, and an over reliance on well-meaning but under-funded NGOs.

This must change.

To bring people battling addiction back into society there must be:

- more attention devoted to early detection;
- more outreach to facilitate entry into treatment and prevent people from becoming marginalized;
- greater intervention to prevent the spread of disease (particularly HIV and hepatitis) through drug use;

- drug treatment should be integrated into mainstream public health and social services;
- and there should be engagement from families, employers, criminal justice, and the community.

Most of all, instead of a number of well-meaning yet disjointed interventions, mayors and municipalities should develop community-wide networks operating under a common strategic umbrella in order to have all players contributing more effectively to a common cause.

We all have a shared responsibility to fight drugs and protect those who are vulnerable to them. You have a special role to play because you are closest to the problem – on the streets of your cities.

I urge you to engage the citizens of your cities in the fight against drug addiction. Your civic leadership and your ability to harness public support – in addition to enforcing the law and providing treatment – can make the social immune system of your cities less vulnerable to the threat posed by drugs.

Congratulations to the European Cities Against Drugs for its work in fighting drug addiction. I wish you a successful meeting and look forward to hearing about its results.

Let's work together to make safer and healthier cities.