



UNODC

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Report of the Study Tour of Delegations from Kyrgyzstan visiting Drug Demand Reduction/HIV control activities in Iran

11-15 June 2012

Day 1

The study tour initiated with the warm welcoming by Mr Antonino De Leo, the UNODC Country Representative in Iran, wishing for a productive and educational study tour. The Kyrgyz delegation consisted of:

1. Mr. Dastan Bekeshev, Parliament member (Deputy Chairman, Legitimacy, Law Enforcement and Fight against Crime Committee)
2. Mr. Ahmadhon Yusupkhanov, Advisor to Member of Parliament: Dastan Bekeshev
3. Mr. Tashpolot Baltabaev, Parliament member (Deputy Chairman, Social Policy Committee)
4. Ms. Galina Skripkina, Parliament member (Member of Foreign Issues Committee)
5. Ms. Elmira Imanalieva, Parliament member (Deputy Chairman, Education, Science, Culture and Sports Committee)
6. Ms. Inga Babicheva, AIDS Foundation East-West (AFEW), manager of sub-grant
7. Ms. Mutabara Vohidova, Project Officer, UNODC Tajikistan

The delegation was accompanied by Dr. Gelareh Mostashari, UNODC-Iran's Drug Demand Reduction senior expert Mitra Ahmadinejad, UNODC National Program Assistant, and Maryam Matean, UNODC Intern. The first item on the study tour agenda was a visit to the Psychosocial Health and Addiction Department of the Ministry of Health and Medical Education, where the delegation met with Dr. Abbas Ali Nasehi, Director General, Dr. Ali Nikfarjam, Deputy Director General, and Dr. Firoozeh Jafari, Head of the Addiction Office. After warm welcomes, Dr. Nasehi explained the interconnected nature of mental health, addictions, and public health, and the importance of viewing drug addictions as a health issue that requires scientifically based best practices in its treatment. He gave an overview of the structure and programs of the Ministry of Health in relation to the field of drug demand reduction, which comprises of the three areas of Prevention, Treatment, and Harm Reduction. One of the major success stories of harm reduction and treatment in Iran has been the implementation of Methadone Maintenance Treatment (MMT), where it has been scaled up in the country over the past 10 years since its pilot in 2002. Dr. Nasehi explained how drug addiction can lead individuals to crime in order to support their habit financially, which also has negative implications on their domestic, occupational, community and social lives, as well increasing their chances of being infected with HIV through injection drug use. With MMT however, the cycle of illicit drug use, poverty, and HIV infections is broken, as patients receive their medication in a medically controlled environment, where the risk of HIV infections is decreased as drugs are no longer injected. Dr. Nasehi stated that the centre has seen a drastic decrease in harms associated with drug use after the onset of MMT, and that statistics within the prison system show a decrease in HIV incidence from injection drug use (IDU).

Dr. Nasehi stressed that alongside medical methadone treatment, individual and family psychiatric counselling must take place for best outcomes, as patients do not exist in

isolation. There are approximately 2000 MMT centres in Iran, which currently reaches roughly 400,000 patients. Dr. Jafari then explained that all medical universities in the country have government MMT centres and stressed that the harm reduction focus of MMT is the prevention of HIV transmission.

The next meeting was scheduled with the Iranian Drug Control Headquarters (DCHQ), where the delegation was warmly greeted by Dr. Mohammad Bagher Saberi, Director General, Drug Treatment and Social Support Department, Mr. Hamid Jomeh Pour, Expert, Drug Treatment and Social Support Department, Mr. Taheri, Expert, Protection Department, and Mr. Mohammad Ali Zarei Kousha, Expert, International Relations. After introductions of delegate members, Mr. Dastan Bekeshev expressed the delegation's desire to use the experience and guidance of the Iranian authorities in scaling up drug prevention programs. Dr. Saberi explained that the approach to drug demand reduction must be research-based, which is why the DCHQ works closely with universities, and uses the best practices and experiences of different countries for the most effective outcomes. Dr. Saberi stated that addictions treatment is based on the three principles of 1) accessibility for all, 2) availability of all treatment modalities, and 3) the implementation of MMT in Iran. However, not all drug users access MMT, therefore other harm reduction services, such as HIV education, together with provision of needles, syringes and condoms have been added to the country's priorities. He explained the importance of cooperation between the academic and government sectors, and the benefits of the assistance of psychiatrists, counselors and social workers in program planning. Alongside drug control initiatives, emphasis was laid on the importance of treatment and harm reduction services, as the availability of illicit drugs cannot be eliminated. Dr. Saberi concluded with stating that the implementation of any program must be adequately monitored and evaluated.

Day 2

The second day of the study tour began with a visit to the Tehran Institute of Psychiatry (TIP), where the delegates met with Dr. Jafar Bolhari, Head of the TIP, Dr. Mehrdad Kazemzadeh, Officer in Charge, WHO Collaborative Centre for Mental Health, Dr. Mehrdad Eftekhari, Head, Mental Health Research Centre and Dr. Seyed Kazem Malakooti, Director, WHO Collaborative Centre for Mental Health,. The centre is affiliated with Iran University of Medical Sciences with over 35 years of experience in psychiatry, clinical psychology, and mental health. The visit initiated in the WHO Collaborating Centre for Mental Health, where delegates had an opportunity to visit the Education and Drug Addictions Treatment Unit, where services such as group and individual therapy took place. The Education Centre, which is an integrated education and treatment centre, was viewed next, where a review of methadone treatment was given. The delegates had an opportunity to view various MMT modalities, such as methadone tablets and syrup. A visit of the music therapy room and the institute library followed.

A discussions and questions session followed afterwards. Dr. Bolhari explained how Iran became a success story in the field of MMT, through advocacy and legislative changes

towards addictions. The visit concluded with a short presentation on the structure of the Tehran Institute of Psychiatry.

The next item on the agenda was a visit to the Iranian National Centre for Addictions Studies (INCAS), where the delegation met with Dr. Mohammad Reza Fayaz Noori, Technical Manager, and Dr. Babak Roshanaei, Psychiatrist and Clinical Research Consultant. Dr. Roshanaei gave an overview of INCAS, stating that the goals of INCAS lie in the realm of development and application of addiction sciences, research and training, along with collaboration with government and non-governmental organizations to promote addictions prevention. He stated that embedded within this goal is the de-stigmatization of addiction in Iran. Dr. Roshanaei explained the history of opium use in Iran, which opened the floor to questions and discussions by the delegation on the topic of drug use in country and drug prohibition globally. Dr. Mostashari reiterated the point that there is no one solution to drug addiction prevention. Before concluding the visit, the delegation then visited the INCAS day clinic where methadone was dispensed, and had the opportunity to speak with patients currently under MMT.

The delegation was invited for lunch with Mr. De Leo at the UNODC Country Office, where they had the opportunity to discuss MMT in the country. Mr. Tashpolot Baltabaev stated that currently, harm reduction has no legal basis in Kyrgyzstan, and that private Opiate Substitution Treatment (OST) centres would be unacceptable in the country, therefore MMT should start within the public health system. Ms. Elmira Imanalieva expressed some concerns over scaling up MMT programs in Kyrgyzstan, namely social and budgetary concerns. In response, Mr. De Leo explained that the stance the UNODC takes towards addictions is scientific, rather than ideological, and that research has shown that MMT, in combination with other psychosocial treatment modalities, is the most effective avenue in harm reduction.

Lunch was followed by a visit to the private Aayandeh Drug Treatment Centre, where the Kyrgyz delegation met with the Technical Manager of the centre, Dr. Saeed Kafrashi and the centre staff. Dr. Kafrashi gave a detailed overview of the patients and the operations of the centre. He explained how MMT, alongside individual and family counseling, has been very effective in treating patients. Dr. Kafrashi then welcomed a question period, where the delegates asked about the logistics of operating a private clinic. The delegation then viewed videos of peer and family education sessions while Dr. Kafrashi explained the importance of the patient-counselor relationship. The visit was concluded with a tour of the centre services, along with speaking to patients about their treatment experiences.

Day 3

The third day of the study tour began with a visit to the Iranian Research Centre for HIV/AIDS (IRCHA), where the delegation was welcomed by Dr. Minoo Mohraz, Head of IRCHA, and Dr. Afarin Rahimi Movaghar, Manager of the Harm Reductions Department. Dr. Mohraz explained the operations of the centre, which consist of the HIV Positive Club,

Treatment Centre, and the only HIV/AIDS research centre in the country. Dr. Mohraz gave a brief explanation on the situation of HIV transmission in Iran. Initially concentrated within the IDU population, HIV is now being transmitted through sexual contact at an increasing rate in the country.

Dr. Rahimi followed by explaining that there has been a drastic decrease in HIV incidence in IDUs after the implementation of MMT. She then presented an extensive overview of drug use in Iran and the history of harm reduction programs in the country. The Kyrgyz delegation expressed gratitude for the comprehensive overview, as it clarified many questions they had in regards to the implementation of harm reduction activities in Iran. The delegation then visited the Positive Club, where they met with Ms. Nasrin Kordi, the Technical Manager of the Tehran Positive Club, and reviewed the services provided by the club for HIV+ individuals.

The last visit of the study tour was to the Iranian AIDS Society (IRAS) Drop in Centre (DIC) in southern Tehran, where the delegation was welcomed by Dr. Shaeri, Head and Founder of IRAS. Dr. Shaeri gave an overview of the centre and stated that it is located in one of the area's most badly hit by drug use, drug trafficking and sex work, therefore the centre also employs outreach workers to reach the most vulnerable individuals. He gave a presentation on harm reduction activities and the operations of the centre. He explained the activities of the centre, which include education on safe sex, safe injection, HIV/AIDS education, along with the provision of clean needles, condoms, and counseling and referral services. The delegation had an opportunity to view the services of the centre, along with speaking with patients of the DIC.

The study tour concluded with a wrap-up meeting with Mr. De Leo at the UNODC Office. The meeting started with a presentation by Dr. Mostashari summarizing the main points of the three day study tour, which covered the realms drug use globally and in Iran; genetic, social and cultural factors related to drug use; harms of untreated drug use; HIV transmission through IDU; and OST and harm reduction services. Mr. De Leo then guided discussions towards ways governments can embed drug treatment into their public health system. He wrapped up the meeting by expressing hope that the study tour was beneficial to the understanding of drug use, addiction and treatment. Mr. De Leo offered the help of the UNODC in implementing OST programs in Kyrgyzstan, and presented them with a UNODC photo book capturing the individual, community and social challenges to drug use and addictions.

Mr. Dastan Bekeshev, head of the delegation, expressed his sincere gratitude for the support and hospitality of the UNODC Iran Country Office.

Annex- Agenda of the Study visit



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Tentative Agenda

Day 1 – Monday 11 June 2012	
Arrival to Tehran early in the morning	
12:30-13:30	Lunch break
14:00-15:00	Meeting with the Psychosocial Health department, Ministry of Health
15:30-16:30	Meeting with Drug Control Headquarter
Day 2 – Tuesday 12 June 2012	
09:30-10:00	Visit to Tehran Psychiatric Institute
10:30 -11:30	Visit to the Iranian National Centre for Addiction Studies (INCAS)
11:30-12:30	Meeting with the Center of Disease Control, Ministry of Health
13:30-15:30	Lunch Break – UNODC office
16:00-17:00	Visit to a Private OST centre
Day 3 – Wednesday 13 June 2012	
08:30-09:30	Visit to National AIDS Research Centre
9:30- 10:00	Visit to Tehran Positive Club
10:30-12:00	Visit to an NGO with OST programme
13:30-14:30	Lunch
15:00-16:00	Wrap-up meeting
Day 6 and Day 7	
Departure from Tehran	