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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

International drug control efforts cannot be successful in the long term without continuous efforts to reduce the demand for illicit drugs. That is why the drafters of the United Nations drug control Conventions made demand reduction an obligation for Governments. The adoption of the Declaration on the Guiding Principles of Demand Reduction, a globally accepted set of standards, at the Special Session of the General Assembly in 1998, was another important step forward.

Preventing drug abuse is a crucial area of demand reduction. Primary prevention encompasses measures taken to prevent and reduce drug use in populations that are either not using or not seriously involved with drugs. There is good reason for society to give concerted attention to preventing drug abuse. Even a single early drug using experience can result in serious consequences, such as unintentional injury, overdose or arrest.

Primary prevention strategies need to address both the population at large as well as groups that are particularly vulnerable to drug abuse. While large-scale efforts can go a long way to increase awareness and can reduce demand, they may lack sufficient focus and intensity to effectively address the needs of vulnerable populations. An effective drug abuse prevention strategy needs to include both types of measures.

To be effective, primary prevention needs to move from rhetoric to action. All too often, priority is given to highly visible but short-lived responses such as a stand-alone media campaign. Prevention campaigns need to be supported by other complementary measures to result in significant social and economic benefits.

Drug abuse is an ongoing challenge that requires our constant attention and action. As a fundamental health issue, drug use prevention is most closely connected to public health, health promotion and child and youth development. Policymakers need to commit resources to these activities.

Governments cannot be effective in primary prevention operating alone. Partnerships with civil society need to be forged at all levels, locally, nationally and internationally to ensure scarce resources are applied as efficiently as possible and to increase effectiveness in reducing the prevalence of drug use. Their large and direct involvement in this issue lends non-governmental organizations an important perspective that needs to be heard around policy tables.



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President

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