

**We are not breaking the link
between injecting drug use and
HIV vulnerability**

Speech by Dr. Sandro Calvani
Representative
UNODC Regional Centre for East Asia and the Pacific

At the 59th UNESCAP (phase II) special
Ministerial Roundtable on:
*“Integrating economic and social concerns especially
HIV/AIDS in meeting the needs of the Region”*

On Tuesday 2nd September 2003,
at United Nations Conference Centre, Bangkok



UNITED NATIONS
Office on Drugs and Crime
Regional Centre for East Asia and the Pacific

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to add one more point of information. Since the year 2000, eight UN bodies have reached a consensus on principles and effective strategies to prevent the transmission of HIV among drug users.

There are fourteen very practical principles and strategies all proved by scientific evidence and field experience.

I would like to bring the attention of the delegates to two of such principles and strategies which are not widely accepted in the Asia Pacific region and so provide a significant weakness of national and international HIV/AIDS prevention policy. First: **Drug use problems cannot be solved simply by criminal justice initiatives.** A punitive approach may drive people most in need of prevention and care services underground. Where appropriate, drug use treatment should be offered, either as an alternative or in addition to punishment. HIV prevention and drug use treatment programmes within criminal justice institutions are also important components in preventing the transmission of HIV. Second: **A comprehensive package of interventions for HIV prevention among drug users should include:** AIDS education, life skills training, condom distribution, voluntary and confidential counselling and HIV testing, access to clean needles and syringes, bleach materials, and referral to a variety of treatment options.

For these reasons the virus often finds the door to enter the human body widely open through high risk behaviours. In particular, we are concerned of needles sharing among drug users they do not have opportunities of drug users' care and outreach services, they face risk of imprisonment: so they hide and continue every day to spread the virus through sexual relationships with their partners in the wider community, most of which is not even aware of the risk.

While such policies and legislations are more part of the problem than part of the solution of the international HIV/AIDS prevention, also the donor community is paying little attention to this matter.

In countries where 70% or 80% of all new HIV/AIDS infection are due to drug injecting and 20% to other risky behaviour, the international grants in the HIV/AIDS prevention field remain mostly targeted to prevent HIV/AIDS infection due to behaviour other than drug injecting.

We would like to encourage ESCAP and international financial institutions to promote more studies on the socio-economic impact of such severe weakness of national and international HIV/AIDS prevention strategies, in order to better estimate the future scenarios which could result.