



*Executive Director*

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Dr Akaki Zoidze  
Member of Parliament  
Chairmen of the Healthcare and  
Social Issues Committee  
Parliament of Georgia  
Tbilisi

16 October 2017

Dear Dr Zoidze,

I have the honour to refer to the important legislative reform to be undertaken by the Parliament of Georgia and wish to thank you for the update.

The decriminalization of drug use and the possession of small quantities of drug for personal use, without intention to sell, is consistent with the people-centered and pragmatic approach that UNAIDS encourages Georgia to pursue. This approach is embedded in human rights values upheld by the United Nations and is common to many European countries, such as Portugal, the Czech Republic, Switzerland, and the Netherlands. Unsafe injection practices remains a major factor contributing to the growth of new HIV infections in Eastern Europe, and in Georgia in particular. UNAIDS, WHO, UNODC have long established our common position. We recommend that where injecting drug use occurs, countries should prioritize the implementation of needle and syringe programs and opioid substitution therapy, the introduction of which are evidence-based and do not violate UN drug control conventions.

Many drug users need health and legal support, and not criminal punishment. However, many drug users fear that seeking health care services will expose them to adverse legal consequences. By removing such structural barriers to access social and health services, the new law in Georgia would create more favorable conditions to reach people who use drugs with services for the prevention and treatment services of HIV, Hepatitis C and tuberculosis. This new legislation will also reduce an unnecessary burden on law enforcement and justice systems for individuals who pose neither a criminal nor public health threat. We also encourage countries to work toward developing policies and laws that: decriminalize injection and other use of drugs and, thereby, reduce incarceration; decriminalize the use of clean needles and syringes (and that permit needle exchange programmes); and legalize access to OST for people who are opioid-dependent. We also recommend that countries ban compulsory treatment for people who use and/or inject drugs.

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When Portugal decriminalized drug use in 2001, there was no registered increase in drug-related crimes, as many opponents of the reform had feared. The number of drug users in drug-treatment programmes expanded from 23 654 in 1998 to 38 532 in 2008; and during the same, the annual number of new HIV cases among drug users fell from 907 to 267, a decrease attributed to the expansion of harm reduction services and the decriminalization of minor drug offenses.

I hope that the Parliament of Georgia will accomplish the intended law reform along the same lines, and I offer the continued support of UNAIDS to assist you in this important endeavour.

Yours sincerely,



Michel Sidibé