

The International and Interreligious Dialogue to Counteract the Distribution of Drugs Among Youth

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Drug distribution is one of the most urgent and serious social problems in the world. It stands in line with terrorism, arms and human trafficking. Drug abuse and its illegal traffic have long ceased to be something distant and unusual. Today, they not only threaten countries' safety, but also contribute to a variety of severe social problems, such as crime and the spread of AIDS.

According to the European Narcotic, Drugs, and Drug Addiction Research Centre, more than one and a half million Europeans need treatment and social support for their addictions.¹¹ The death rate from the consequences of drug consumption in Russia also remains at a particularly high level. According to the Russian Federal Drug Control Service, 80 000 – 100 000 drug addicts die each year in Russia; heroin alone accounts for the death of 40 000 young people annually.

These results indicate vigorous activity on the part of drug cartels and a great influence on the minds of the younger generation, through oft-hidden advertising. The drug mafia carefully and insidiously inserts itself into youth culture, for example, through attributes of slang language from the drug subculture, thereby raising interest and reducing a negative attitude towards psychoactive substances. I think, it's especially noticeable today that drugs have practically become normal for young people. It's my opinion, that for the most part, smoking "weed" (marijuana) is considered common among young people. A young person smoking "weed" from time to time or taking "pills" (often amphetamines) is common in the current environment, and such a person is even sometimes considered "sophisticated" and successful within his or her social circles.

The drug abuse prevention system is in need of refinement and implementation of a competent communications policy. It is much easier to foster a worldview in young people or lead its formation in a positive direction, than to change or destroy an already developed view. For this reason, the need for a healthy lifestyle should be developed almost from the first days of a person's life.

Currently, we see an imperative to both change existing priorities of the younger generation in Russia, as well as foster a path of morality. There must be a strict barrier between young people and the advocacy of those involved in a "con game", that is, the inculcation of criminal subculture and a consumer attitude. It is also important to encourage the activity of those organizations which support a healthy lifestyle, including first of all youth and religious organizations, in every way possible, as well as carrying out a proper communications policy in the mass media that celebrates good health and denigrates drug abuse.

It is important to show that doing drugs is not an introduction to a fashionable life, but rather a step which leads to loss of civility, degradation, and death. Russia has been treating this problem with the gravity it deserves.

On September 8, 2009, a session devoted to counternarcotics actions was held by the of Security Council of the Russian Federation under the chairmanship of the President of Russia D.A. Medvedev,.

During the session President Medvedev noted that, "For timely diagnostics of this disease among teenagers, a number of measures, including an obligatory testing of students for all educational institutions is offered"; "Counternarcotics actions are to be carried out by the whole society, and preventive actions are to begin in schools at an early age". Finally, he declared, "School, should devote more attention to educating students about drug abuse"¹.

Regarding drug abuse prevention, considering that several US models are more or less successfully used around the world, it is desirable to refer to state models for such preventions in the US and analyze them. At the moment, the drug abuse prevention system in the US includes three base models: the NIDA, the NIAAA and an economic model of supply and demand that an extremely high level of drug abuse in Russia unequivocally underscores the social and spiritual problems for Russian youth.

¹ Council of Europe: http://www.coe.int/t/R/Press/%5BTheme_files%5D/%5BDrugs%5D/

In such conditions it is helpful to make wider use of the experience accumulated by the Russian Orthodox Church, Islam, Buddhism, and other traditional faiths, to promote in every way possible the spiritually-preventive and rehabilitation actions of the faithful towards drug addicts.

As an example of positive cooperation of members of religious faiths and public authorities, several working meetings, held in August 2005 in Kaliningrad, should be noted. In attendance were regional drug enforcement representatives, ecclesiastics of the Russian Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches, rabbis from the Kaliningrad Jewish community, pastors from the Evangelical-Lutheran Passauer diocese, and representatives of city's Muslim community. The regional spread of drug addictions and ways of implementing preventive measures were discussed at the meeting. The discussion resulted in the signing of an agreement which requires all religious structures to unite in the promotion of a healthy lifestyle and participation in joint efforts to counter drug addiction and the distribution of drugs among citizens of the Kaliningrad region by means of spiritual and moral education.

Members of traditional faiths have also prepared an open letter to the citizens of Yantarniy Kray with an appeal for people to join in the struggle to try and help people already facing this problem, to allow no new victims, to work for the protection of the younger generation, and not to stand apart waiting until this affects them personally.

The 18th International Christmas Educational Reading was held in January 2010 under the auspices of FDCS Russia. One of the topics covered was "Spiritual and Medical Aid in Overcoming Drug Addiction, Alcohol Abuse and the Poisonous Effects of Tobacco Smoking". The event was achieved with the support of the FDCS of Russia and the State anti-drug committee of the Russian Federation (GAK), and was blessed by His Holiness Cyril, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia.

All of the ecclesiastics that spoke and the medical workers and laymen helping them, noted the high success rate of rehabilitation methods based on patristic studies in the struggle with spiritual illness. It was noted that the rehabilitation methods used by those in the Orthodox church had a success rate with addicts of sixty to ninety percent, which clearly shows the nature of the given diseases as having a spiritual aspect which can be treated spiritually.

Today, the Russian Orthodox Church has a unique strategy, combining healthy lifestyle advocacy in physical terms as well as in spiritual and moral terms. For the Church, these are the basic components in primary and secondary drug abuse prevention. One example of such an organization is the All-Russia Ioano-Pretechensky Orthodox brotherhood known as "Trezvenie".

Despite the difficult economic and social situation in southern regions of Russia, the republics of Caucasus are rather healthy in terms of drug abuse. For example, during the drug abuse peak in Dagestan recorded seven years ago, Makhachkala had fifty drug addicts for every 100,000 citizens. On average, Russia had 120 addicts for the same 100,000. Experts were surprised, initially wondering how a drug-producing region during an epidemic maintained such a low rate for drug addiction. Statistical departments were blamed; experts wondered if they had properly done their job. Eventually, it was discovered that the reason for the lower rates of drug addiction was because of religiousness of this Muslim nation.

Unlike one stereotype of Buddhism, the true Buddhist keeps himself far from drugs as well. Historically, Buddhists never used any narcotic substances in their practices. In minds of Buddhists, drugs pose a strong threat of addiction which is difficult to escape. Like all addictions, it takes freedom away and ultimately blocks the chain of regenerations known as *samsara*. Additionally, doing drugs strongly affects karma. If a person steals, he tricks himself into believing that he is poor, does not have something an other person has, and is not capable of earning it himself. In this way, theft leads to poverty. If a person is generous, he believes he has something to share and gives it to people, then wealth will be the karmic result. People that consume drugs signal--in the karmic sense--that they are incapable, for example, of feeling joy without the use of drugs.²

The problem of drug distribution is not only a topic of my thesis research. As an employee of the law-enforcement block of FTS (Federal Customs Service) in Russia, I

² http://www.narkotiki.ru/christianity_6756.html

would like to note that another promising method of drug interdiction today is international law-enforcement and public cooperation.

The largest drug manufacturing area in the world is still the Republic of Afghanistan. It is indicative that, as of today, even the piracy phenomenon in the Gulf of Aden is seen by the world community as a threat to international peace and safety, but a world-wide phenomenon – Afghani drugs manufacturing – is not. And this is despite the fact that heroin manufacturing in Afghanistan has grown forty times in recent years. Today, it is necessary to improve local as well as international legislations and of course not towards easing the responsibility for the actions connected with the manufacture and distribution of drugs. For example, experts in counterdrug trafficking (in particular, members of the FDCS in Russia) suggest aiming for an increase of the status of Afghani drug manufacturers to that of an international threat to peace and safety. This measure would allow for the UN to receive authority to perform an intervention in the current problem – from imposing sanctions to carrying out special international operations-- on the basis of Article 42 of The Charter of the United Nations.

To stop the growing amount of crimes committed by those under the effects of narcotics, criminal responsibility for participation in organized drug groups or even for indirect assistance to corresponding business should match the severity and consequences of the crime committed which is committed against life and health of people.

In considering international law-enforcement cooperation in the Northwest region of the Russian Federation, it is important to note that currently the most effectively organized interaction of law-enforcement divisions in customs is with the Central Criminal Police of Estonia and with members of customs in the Southern and Eastern districts of Finland.

These interactions, based on real cooperation, not only enable authorities to organize work in revealing drug couriers and people involved in organizing drug traffic, but they also exchange advance information on vehicles and routes used for drug trafficking and methods for concealment and masking used during transportation and distribution. Additionally, information sharing about new kinds of drugs, manufacturing methods, legalization of income received from drug trafficking, and other information also takes place. This results in dozens of criminal cases, constantly growing amounts of seized drugs, large numbers of joint operations, roundtable discussions and working meetings.

Another positive example of such interaction is the cooperation within the Council of the Barents Euro-Arctic Region (SBER), created in 1993. The above Council, in addition to the Russian Federation, also includes Iceland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland. As an intergovernmental interaction authority of the countries/participants, the Council acts to secure sustainable development in the region, the expansion of bilateral and multilateral cooperation in the sphere of economics, trade, science and technology, environment, infrastructure, education and cultural exchanges, tourism, and in the implementation of projects oriented towards improving the quality of life for the population of the North.

Once every three months, customs services representatives of the countries/participants of SBRE hold coordination meetings; among the questions raised are the permanent problems of drug trafficking.

Within the scope of Council there is also a SBRE working group on youth policy (Working Group on Youth Policy, WGYP), a joint working group of SBRE and the Barents regional council on health and related social issues (Working Group on Health and Related Social Issues, WGHS), and the joint working group of SBRE and the Barents regional council on education and research (Working Group on Education and Research, WGER).

The working groups listed above, among other things, are engaged in drug abuse prevention, the protection of children's rights for those left without foster parents, healthy lifestyle promotion, and the expansion of cultural connections.

The Russian Federation served as president of SBRE from 2007-2009; now, in 2010-2011, the presidency has been passed to Sweden.

Another organization supporting a Europe free of drugs, and representing millions of European citizens is the international noncommercial organization European Cities Against Drugs (ECAD). ECAD cities come forward with initiatives and carry out various anti-drug events in support of United Nations conventions--against

legalization and promoting anti-drug policies with the goal of eliminating drug abuse all over the world. Within the framework of ECAD, bi- and multi-lateral seminars ("Dragboks," etc.) are being held, meetings of the mayors of participant cities are being held (this year in Malta), and expert training and other events aimed at stimulation of decrease in drug consumption in Europe are convened.

The participation of the European Council in actions against illegal drug abuse and drug trafficking is carried out within the framework of a multipurpose coordination group known as "Pompidou's Group". It was founded in 1971 at the initiative of Z. Pompidou, who was the president of France at the time; in 1980 it joined the Council of Europe structure. Within its frameworks, European ministers, officials, experts and specialists share their experiences.

Pompidou's Group is an intergovernmental authority within which members are countries, not private individuals or national departments. The Group now includes 34 states. Since 1991, the Group has given technical assistance to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe that are not part of the group. Representatives from non-European states – the US and Canada-- were also invited to join Group events. Group functions are implemented on a multidisciplinary principle. This means that it operates in all spheres connected with drug abuse, including such areas as medicine, social security, education, public justice, law enforcement, sports and youth. The Group intends to carry out three main functions: to develop innovative approaches, to stimulate further interaction, and to carry out its coordinating role in the varied situations presented by drug addition on the European continent

To sum up, it is safe to say that counteracting drug distribution in the present day world is only possible through the implementation of carefully considered international-legal, interreligious and intercultural programs proportionate to the said problem.