

# Statement of Kachin State Drugs Users

*Myitkyina, 28<sup>th</sup> of November 2016*

We, drug users from Myitkyina, Nawng Chein, Dum Gan, Wuyan, Hsar Maw, Waimaw, Washawng, Mogaung, Mohnyin, Inn Taw Gyi area and Hopin, came together last November for a two days workshop in Myitkyina, to discuss the challenges and difficulties we face and experience and identify possible solutions to our problems.

Based on the outcomes of our discussions, **we would like to submit to the Union Government and to Kachin State regional authorities the following recommendations.**

One of the key challenges we are currently facing is insufficient access to health care services. Most of us are injecting drug users. We are taking Methadone substitution treatment to reduce the spread of epidemics such as HIV, Hepatitis B and C, which can be transmitted as a result of unsafe injecting practices. However, we are still facing many difficulties to get easy and sufficient access to Methadone treatment. Most of us are living in remote areas and are poor workers barely able to make a living. It takes us about half a day every day to go and receive Methadone treatment at the dispensing sites. Going back and forth to the Methadone dispensing sites also has a financial cost. As Methadone is a long-term therapy, we will endlessly relapse to heroin use if we cannot maintain regular access to Methadone treatment.

We therefore respectfully request to: expand and open additional dispensing sites to ensure easier access to Methadone; to implement measures that will allow a faster daily intake of Methadone; to relieve us from additional expenses and financial burden; and to relax rules and regulations to allow an easier access to Methadone treatment. We would also like to recommend providing Methadone Maintenance Therapy and other healthcare services for drugs users in detention centres and prisons.

Another difficulty we are facing at the moment is a shrinking access to harm reduction programs. Harm Reduction services have been provided in Kachin State for more than a decade under the guidance and directives of Myanmar Ministry of Health and Sports. Thanks to services such as Needles and Syringes Exchange Programs, HIV Testing and Counselling and Antiretroviral Therapy for People living with HIV, we have been able to remain healthy and live like ordinary people. However, public opinion is now distrustful of harm reduction programs. If we do not have access to those services, HIV, Hepatitis and other blood-borne diseases epidemics will increase. This situation is threatening drugs users and our families. We therefore recommend, instead of closing down Harm Reduction

programs, to provide continued access and further expand those services. We are also urging to have easier access to “Naloxone”, a lifesaving overdose reversal medication.

Drug users in Kachin State are currently experiencing the bitter feeling to be targeted and arrested by community groups, police and local authorities. We are facing arbitrary beatings, arrests and punishments, without proper investigations, at the hands of law enforcement agencies and anti-drugs groups. The imposition of prison penalties for drug use, or possession of small quantities of drugs for personal use, is a disproportionately harsh sentence, which durably stains young people’s lives with stigma. Furthermore, drug dependence treatment is not available at detention centres and prisons. As a result, we are demanding to decriminalise drug use and possession for personal use. We are also requesting to end the arbitrary arrests and detention of drug users until current drug laws have been reviewed.

Drugs users should not be sent to compulsory detoxification centres against their will. We only need effective health services and we strongly condemn the use of violence against drugs users.

Drugs laws and policies are directly impacting our lives. We are therefore underlining how crucial it is that drug users concerns are taken into account to formulate drug laws and policies.

We all, respectfully request to replace harsh and punitive drug policies with policies that provide for the implementation of effective drug prevention and education as well as health and social support for drug users.