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On 9–10 July Ukraine will host an AIDS 2012 pre-conference ‘Ensuring That Our Voice Is Heard’ in Kyiv for the regional community of people who use drugs (PWUD)

June 19 2012, Vilnius, Lithuania: AIDS Forum in Kiev ‘Ensuring That Our Voice Is Heard’ is a pre-conference of the XIX International AIDS Conference held on 22–27 July 2012 in Washington D.C., USA. It will convene approximately 50 representatives of the community of PWUD and other key affected populations from Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA). Since most drug users from EECA won’t be able to attend the conference in Washington because of travel to USA restrictions, this forum will become a platform for the representation of interests of PWUD and other key affected populations from this region in the Conference.

The Forum will provide a unique opportunity for community representatives to meet experts from the leading international agencies and to communicate their messages to the delegates of the International AIDS Conference.

"We want people whose decisions impact our lives to hear us, we want them to be aware of the consequences of so-called minor reductions in HIV funding, and to realize that people are waiting for life-saving treatment and often die failing to receive it. I’m talking specifically about HIV and TB treatment and substitution therapy,” - says Olga Belyaeva, AIDS Forum’s Community board member, chairman of the All-Ukrainian public organization Association of Substitution Treatment Advocates of Ukraine.

"International donors and national governments should face the consequences of their political and financial decisions on the EECA countries that affect the lives of people who use drugs. Hearing the voice of the communities is crucial for future short-term-oriented decisions that could have a positive impact on the HIV situation in the region,” says Alison Crocket, Senior Advisor at UNAIDS and one of the forum’s speakers.

Participants of AIDS Forum in Kiev ‘Ensuring That Our Voice Is Heard’ will discuss two main issues that hinder progress in addressing the HIV/AIDS epidemic in EECA – violations of human rights of PWUD and the lack of funding for harm reduction and HIV prevention and treatment services. International organizations (WHO, UNAIDS, and other) recommend harm reductions programs as an effective evidence–based measure to prevent HIV.
The lack of funding is not the only reason why the HIV epidemic continues to expand in the region: “Punitive drug policies and stigmatization of people who use drugs deter HIV prevention and treatment access. If governments and international communities will continue to wink at drug users’ rights violations in their countries, they won’t be able to take control over the growing HIV epidemic in EECA,” says Dasha Ochere, one of the Forum’s organizers and Deputy Director for Policy and Advocacy of the Eurasian Harm Reduction Network.

Attendees will participate in plenary sessions, capacity-building sessions on communication and advocacy, and in video documentary sessions where they will record short video messages for the delegates of the International AIDS Conference. Additionally, strategic planning of the Eurasian Network of People who Use Drugs (ENPUD) and elections to its Executive Committee will take place.

The Hub is organized by the Eurasian Harm Reduction Network (EHRN) and the International HIV/AIDS Alliance in Ukraine, with funding and support from AIDS 2012 Conference Coordinating Committee.

Media representatives who would like to attend the AIDS Forum in Kiev ‘Ensuring That Our Voice Is Heard’ are kindly asked to register by following address: erika@harm-reduction.org.

About AIDS 2012
The International AIDS Conference is the largest gathering of professionals working in the field of HIV, including people living with HIV and other leaders in the HIV response. It plays a fundamental role in shaping the global response to HIV and in keeping HIV and AIDS on the international political agenda.

For more information on AIDS 2012 visit www.aids2012.org.

Conference organization:
AIDS 2012 is convened by the International AIDS Society and the conference’s permanent partners are the Global Network of People Living with HIV (GNP+); the International Council of AIDS Service Organizations (ICASO); the International Community of Women with HIV/AIDS (ICW) and the United Nations Joint Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS).

About the IAS
The International AIDS Society (IAS) is the world’s leading independent association of HIV professionals, with over 16,000 members from more than 196 countries working at all levels of the global response to AIDS. Our members include researchers from all disciplines, clinicians, public health and community practitioners on the frontlines of the epidemic, as well as policy and programme planners. The IAS is the custodian of the biennial International AIDS Conference and lead organizer of the IAS Conference on HIV Pathogenesis, Treatment and Prevention, which will be held next in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in June 2013. For more information on the IAS visit www.iasociety.org.

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