

Sowing Change to Harvest Justice – HR25 Closing Plenary Speech

Delivered on behalf of the community of people who use drugs

Dear friends, allies, comrades,

It is an honour to stand here today — not just as an individual, but as part of a global community of people who use drugs and a global harm reduction family.

The theme of this conference — *Sowing Change to Harvest Justice* — speaks directly to our lives. For decades, we've been sowing change. Often in silence. Often in crisis, but always with courage.

But let me tell you a little bit about my life — through numbers.

I am 45. I began using psychoactive substances at 14, and I began injecting at 16. But I received my first clean syringe from a harm reduction programme at 23 — the same age I found out I was living with HIV and hepatitis C. I lived on the streets. I survived six overdoses. I was denied medical care three times. I lost two jobs because of my status. I could have gone to prison four times. I lost an enormous number of friends in the “War on Drugs”. I had over 50 failed attempts to “treat” my drug use before I became one of the first 30 lucky patients on OAT in Ukraine.

And today I'm here, alive, a leader of my community and a loving dad of a six-year-old son.

That's what sowing change looks like.

We sow change when we hand out naloxone and clean syringes — not as charity, but as resistance.

We sow change when we build peer-led networks in the ruins of collapsing health systems.

We sow change when we survive — and bring others with us.

And now we are calling for the harvest.

We need to ask ourselves:

* How does this big conference help a woman who uses drugs and who's about to face sexual violence in the slums of Chibolia, Lusaka Zambia?

* How does our being here enhance the social well-being of a person who uses drugs in the streets of Jakarta, Indonesia?

* How does our being here give autonomy to the peer educator who's now intimidated by a project coordinator and threatened not to be paid their stipend?

Because justice is not being invited to speak — but never truly heard.
Justice is not funding harm reduction — while defunding the communities who built it.

Justice is not seeing our names in reports — but never in budgets.

Justice means community-led harm reduction is funded, respected and protected.

Justice means our lived experience is recognised as expertise.

Justice means no more policies about us, without us — anywhere, ever again.

Today, our future is under threat.

Cuts to U.S. harm reduction funding.

A recent letter from the GF about the activities put on hold and a 30% cut.

Uncertainty in the Robert Carr Fund.

Shrinking space for community voices.

We are being asked to do more — with less — while overdose, HIV, hepatitis and criminalisation rage on.

In Eastern Europe and Central Asia, laws targeting civil society are criminalising even the word “advocacy”. In Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and soon Kazakhstan, NGO laws are silencing us. What we’ve built over decades is being dismantled — and we are being told to survive without support.

Meanwhile, in Africa, South East Asia and Latin America, people who use drugs are still locked in abusive treatment centres, imprisoned — denied medical care, forced into withdrawal, and given no food, no rights, no dignity.

That is not harm reduction. That is torture.

But we are not only victims of violence — we are architects of change.

From VOLNa in Ukraine working under the bombs to LANPUD in Latin America, from Nairobi to New York, we are leading the most radical work in harm reduction — because we are doing what systems refuse to do: care, adapt, resist, survive.

Bogotá has reminded us of this truth — that *el buen vivir* is not a theory, but a practice. That mutual care is resistance. That we don't need permission to love and protect one another.

And I want to thank Colombia and the Colombian people for their love and protection over the days of the conference. And I want to ask something Colombian government: "You won an important diplomatic victory at the recent meeting of the UN Commission On Narcotic Drugs, which gives the world a chance to rethink global drug policy and finally end the "War on Drugs", but there is no stopping, don't lose track, and I ask you to support financially the organisation of the UN High-Level Panel on Drug Policy, an important step that will allow us to move forward and not lose success."

As one of our community members said: "Together we are stronger. And we have to be strong. We all want a better future — so we must demand it. Friends, we need each other."

(Interaction with the audience***)

***Friends, people, I want to hear you, people of all communities!give me a noise my harm reduction family!

***Women!....anti-prohibitionism and narcofeminism forever!

So, let this be the message from Bogotá:

If you want to sow real change — fund us.

If you want to harvest justice — centre us.

If you believe in harm reduction — follow our lead.

This conference, this movement, this moment — it is ours. We have sown change in the hardest soil. Now we stand together to say: we will harvest justice. No matter what it takes.

Let's move forward. Together. Louder. Bolder. Unstoppable.

Thank you, Bogotá.

Thank you, #HR25.

And thank you to every person who continues to fight — even when no one is watching.