



Elimination of violence against women who use drugs

Global campaign summary

Coinciding with the United Nations international day to eliminate violence against women, and the subsequent 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence Campaign (25 November to 10 December), women who use drugs and their allies around the world unleashed a diverse and dynamic series of actions under the uniting themes:

The war on drugs enables violence against women

End the war, end the violence

And

Drug use is NOT an excuse for violence and abuse

also utilising orange (reflecting international 'orange the world' theme colour for eliminating violence against women).

Women who use drugs are exposed to higher rates of violence than other women. This violence includes, (but is not limited to) rape, sexual harassment, extortion, loss of child custody, imprisonment for mere personal possession, extra judicial killing, capital punishment and penalisation for drug use in pregnancy. Prohibition either directly causes or greatly exacerbates conditions for all of these violations.

Gender-based violence cannot be eliminated if those most affected are not directly and meaningfully involved at all levels in relevant policy and programming.

Women who use drugs are boldly stepping out to take their place in the women's movement and efforts to stop Gender-based violence. Collectively we and our allies call for governments to end the gendered, failed and murderous policy of drug prohibition.

The following summary features actions performed in Indonesia, Burundi, Australia, Ukraine, Nigeria, Greece, Mexico, Spain, USA, Mauritius, Nepal, Lithuania and Seychelles

Ukraine



Club Eney organised the first 'March of Women who Use Drugs Against Violence' in Ukraine which took place on December 8. ***Please watch the visually spectacular march and action [here](#)*** The march and associated actions were carefully planned to achieve maximum exposure and impact. Participants used orange fluff and posters to unite with the global campaign, together with orange masks, fishing rods, coloured smoke and handcuffs – to create an astounding performance event. The team went out in the city streets to appeal for the safety of women who use drugs. First they gathered to announce the manifesto, describing the issues and the required solutions. Then they marched through a busy city route, holding posters, distributing flyers and orange masks and chanting the messages: *Every woman in Ukraine has the right to a safe life! Stop the war, stop the violence! No for violence against women! Drug use is NOT an excuse for violence and abuse!* This culminated with an action where women stood with posters and coloured smoke to attract the attention of others to the problem and involve people in the campaign.

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A list of demands were shared with people on the street who gathered to observe the performance:

- To assert the right to autonomy over the bodies of women who use drugs, including the choice to use drugs
- Introduce mechanisms for the prevention and support of women who use drugs who are in violent situations
- Stop misrepresentation of facts related to drug use, pregnancy, forced abortion and sterilization campaigns, and drug user parenting
- Gender mainstream research and service delivery. Women who use drugs are the experts on their lives and should participate in the research, planning, development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of any service programs that are relevant to them.

Club Eney also conducted a [media interview](#) about the campaign (already widely viewed).

Mauritius



Campaigners, organised by Ailes and members of the national drug user network, strategically participated in the UN driven women's march. At a certain point, advocates were able to access the microphone to speak about how women who use drugs face violence every day from law enforcement as well as in domestic settings; and that the specificities of these experience should be taken into consideration so as to stop all forms of violence against women who use drugs.

A support group was organized with women who use drugs to engage in experience sharing discussions on their daily struggles and means they use to survive violence. During the campaign, the women's group also engaged with a representative from the Seychelles drug user network who opened discussion on differences and similarities in violent occurrences against women who use drugs between the two neighbour nations. The campaign T-shirt was shared to support a similar awareness campaign in the Seychelles.

A representative from Passerelle, (a shelter for women in distress), also joined the campaign grouping to further collaborations to safeguard women who use drugs from violence. In addition, a representative from la Re-union for the HIV Indian Ocean Colloque spoke on women who use drugs and difficulties they are experiencing in access to health and other services. Significant media coverage of the campaign was achieved (please view [here](#)).

Mexico



In the Mexican border city of Tijuana, the Wound Clinic and La Casa del Centro organized a social media campaign and a series of events. On every day of the campaign calls-to-action, campaign photos, and resources focused on the violence confronting women who use drugs were shared. These posts were directly disseminated with other organizations throughout Mexico and the rest of Latin America who reshared this information with their own networks. Additionally, three arts and storytelling workshops were facilitated with a group of women who use drugs. A comfortable and safe environment was designed for women to share and create art on two mobile murals about their experiences with inter-

personal and state violence. During these events, global campaign posters and stickers were distributed to the women participants. These mobile murals will continue to be used at public events to educate the broader public about the stigma experienced by women who are both drug users and homeless in Tijuana.



Burundi



Women who use drugs participated in the ceremonies marking the 16 days of activism to eliminate violence. A presentation and discussion on the topic of gender-based violence was conducted with a team approach, exploring also activities to end such violence at the national and international levels.

The women involved shared their lived experience by documenting the forms of gender-based violence they had survived, which included physical violence by police, spouses and family members or members of the public, sexual violence, psychological harassment

through injustice, insults and demeaning messages, imprisonment, torture and forced separation from children and family. These experiences will be highlighted in ongoing advocacy to protect the rights of women who use drugs nationally. An outcome of the ceremony was a commitment for a women who use drugs group which will now meet weekly and be engaged in capacity building workshops to strengthen advocacy skills. BANPUD (the national drug user network) also organised a radio show to raise awareness of violence against women who use drugs, involving the Ministry of Gender Promotion who agreed to support protective measures.

Indonesia



The campaign to eradicate violence against women using drugs was jointly conducted by women who use drugs from the cities of Bogor, Jakarta, Bekasi and Depok. An opening activity was held on November 25, by Yayasan Rumah Sebaya with women who use drugs and other government and non-government stakeholders to run an open discussion on the international day for elimination of violence against women. Participants related experience of violence experienced at the hands of law enforcement, including rape and other violations, as well as restrictions is seeking police assistance in other violent scenarios. The activity was opened by the Head of the Bekasi Office of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection, with academic presentations

followed by an explanation of assistance available for survivors and processes for reporting cases as well as sharing from survivors of victims of violence. The objective of this activity was to highlight the need to stop the war on drugs, and also stop violence against women who use drugs.

Action for Justice Indonesia likewise conducted an action, under the theme "Drug Use is Not An Excuse For Violence And Abuse" in Bogor which began with a march and inviting onlookers to the park to join activities by signing campaign banners. The team, consisting of women who use drugs from four cities, conducted awareness raising related to eliminating violence against women who use drugs targeting the general public in Bogor. Next was a theatre performance to open the eyes and hearts of the general public to understand that this problem is in our midst and the need for support from the community and the government to eliminate violence make it easier for women who use drugs to access justice. The activity ended with presentations, open discussion and a dynamic question and answer session led by quest presenters from the health and community law sectors. Some associated media coverage can be viewed [here](#).

NSW, Australia



The Sydney Medically Supervised Injecting Centre (MSIC) hosted an afternoon tea in their 'aftercare' area which was well received by clients who came through the service on Tues 26th November. 50 peers were engaged in a 2 hour facilitated discussion around the war on drugs and its impact on women who use drugs. Throughout the month of November, imagery and some of the terrible statistics highlighting the impact of violence against women and girls in society were displayed, as well as advice on referral points that offer support to both survivors and perpetrators.



Western Australia



With the aim to promote the 16 Days of Action to start conversations, raise awareness, and support women who use drugs and may be experiencing violence, staff and volunteers from the Peer Based Harm Reduction WA organised and promoted the event by including strong women who are open about their lived experience of drug use and violence. Their leadership enabled the design of activity most relevant to women service users. Resources were developed providing referral information for women who may be survivors of violence, and men who may be, or have been, perpetrators of violence against women. Further, a range of resources for women and families were collated into violence resource packs.

Women peers provided guidance that the two most practical resources would be phone cards (to use from a public phone) and public transport cards. Both of these items were sourced for the resource packs and, to ensure sustainability, will still be

made available for women service users beyond the 16 Days of Action. Global campaign materials were incorporated into a noticeboard display which ran from the Perth and Bunbury needle syringe programs for the duration of the campaign. During this period, over 300 women service users accessed the service. The campaign poster and the peer produced resource were professionally printed and circulated to partner organisations for distribution through their services. An associated [media statement](#) was produced and campaign materials were disseminated to other agencies in the Alcohol and Other Drugs sector through our networks, including across all Needle and Syringe Programs in WA.

Nigeria



YouthRISE Nigeria joined the global campaign via the 'Orange Hands Campaign' to advocate for an end to violence against women who use drugs and push the drug policy reform agenda in Nigeria. The campaign commenced with a [Press Release](#) calling for the elimination of all forms of violence against women who use drugs by reviewing repressive drug laws that undermine human rights and dignity, health and social justice. This was disseminated via social media. Following this, compelling stories of women drug users in Nigeria were shared on all YouthRISE Nigeria social media platforms to highlight human rights violations, stigma and other forms of violence they have experienced.

Other activities included a **Novelty Football Match** (see short media report video [here](#)) on December 10. A football game was organized between female police officers and young women who use drugs. This aimed to correct negative perception, stigma and discrimination held among the Nigeria Police Force regarding women who use drugs. It was also an opportunity to advocate for rights-based drug control in Nigeria.

In addition, an open house event and exhibition was held on the side of a national symposium on drug policy organized by YouthRISE Nigeria. At this event, photographic experiences of women who use drugs were exhibited. Also at the venue, there was an "Orange Booth" where participants took photos and had access to campaign advocacy materials. Hand stamps and signatures of participants were collected to show their endorsement of the campaign.



Greece



Days before the event, PeerNUPS (the Women 's Group within the Greek Peer Network of People who Use Drugs) released a press statement that attracted onward mentions in [social media](#). The event was held in Athens on December 10 at a popular café venue with a series of informal presentations and a chaired question and answer session resulting in lively and very informative warm and friendly conversation. Many of the guests were well known experts with a personal history of drug use. In association with the event, a stall full of products was made available for attendees to help themselves (including safe use 'works' such as syringes etc that were donated; t-shirts produced by PeerNUPS; t-shirts donated by IDPC for the #SupportDontPunish campaign; PeerNUPS lighters and flyers with the PeerNUPS 'manifesto'). After the event, there was almost nothing left, so the t-shirts and flyers will be in circulation for long after this evening and will 'talk' about our issues.

In addition, Presenza, the prestigious activist site, published a very positive presentation on an [article](#), hours after the event.

USA



Urban Survivors Union (USU) and NC Survivors Union created a [Facebook page](#) for 16 Days of Action to raise awareness of violence against women who use drugs. For each of the 16 days, a posting activity relating to the topic and aligning with the slogan "Drug Use is not an Excuse for Violence and Abuse" was shared to the page. Some of the posting actions included sharing a personal video, creating personalised versions of the campaign poster, an article and response relating to the subject of violence against women who use drugs, and even sharing a piece of art. Four women took leading roles which required them to encourage other people to post, as well as sharing their posts on both their personal page and the 16 Days page as well as other groups and networks. Each post was tied to the project by the campaign hashtags. The responses and comments to posts were for the most part positive and even those few that were not led to a place of discussion and education. The women shared brave and powerful messages through Facebooks social media network, such as one that said "I refuse to be treated as any less than a human being, my rights and my fight are just as valid as the person next to me, no matter what my gender and personal choices are". Each of the four leading women each wrote and passed in storytelling of a personal experience relating to the subject of sexual violence in connection to their drug use, to be retold in an upcoming webinar that will focus on the subject of violence against women who use drugs. The 16 Days of Action page will be kept up and will advertise the upcoming webinar. This is no longer 16 days this is 365 days of action; USU are changing the Facebook page to reflect ongoing commitment to this subject with a core group of women around the country now committed to this subject matter. It is currently made up of 8 women but we know this will grow as we continue to put the work in and promote the message that drug use is not an excuse for violence and abuse.

Lithuania



This year, the youth-led organization "Young Wave" from Lithuania, joined the 16 days of action campaign to eliminate violence against women who use drugs. They gathered to discuss, what challenges women who use drugs face, just because of drug use and what responses can be created to stop stigma and discrimination.



Nepal



RN Women, (the national network of women who use drugs), organized a violence against women campaign for the 16th days of activism. Advocacy from local level to national level to raise awareness about issues of violence and abuse against women who use drugs. Actions began in Kathmandu where RN women members from regions met the focal person of Save the Children International wearing orange T-shirts and with the campaign poster and slogans. The team then visited

the National Center for AIDS and STDs Control (NCASC) with the same message and had a meeting with the Director to seek support our movement on drug use and gender issues and ending violence. The campaign subsequently continued during early December across six regions of Nepal; Pokhara, Nepalgunj, Birgunj, Itahari and Chitwan, where RN women members variously conducted awareness raising advocacy and rallies to push for elimination of violence against women who use drugs. On the last day of the campaign, the central team issued a [press release](#) in Kathmandu inviting key stakeholders and media personnel to the Reporter's Club. A summary statement indicating data related to women who use drugs in Nepal was presented with discussion on violence led by the chief guest, a well-known social activist.



Dristi Nepal also participated by joining the National Rally organized by the Women's Commission of Nepal, using slogans and banners to draw attention to violence against women who use drugs. Dristi jointly organised a [National Consultation](#) and joined the [Rally](#) on International Women Human Rights Defenders Day to spotlight women human rights defenders from the drug using community. In addition, Dristi conducted a photo campaign on December 10, with lived experience stories from women who use drugs disseminated through social media .

Barcelona, Spain



Metzineres and Xadud (a network of women who use drugs) began preparations for the international day to eliminate violence against women from November 19 by inviting women who use drugs to participate, using campaign products and also talking about the rights of homeless women. On November 25, the prepared women participated in the march for Elimination of Violence Against Women, using the slogan 'women use drugs deal with it', global campaign posters and some others produced by the women. Orange helium balloons were distributed and people asked to write messages on harm reduction (explaining the concept and our work) and messages of how patriarchy enables violence against women who use drugs. A musician performed her short rap story in front of a large crowd as a surprise action within the March ahead of famous feminist rap sisters going to the stage.

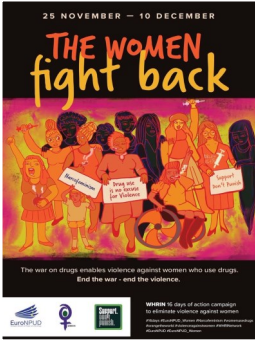
On November 28, women who use drugs participated in a talk on PrEP advocating for expansion of access to women that use drugs, particularly those providing sex for survival. In early December a collective talk on gender violence and transphobia was conducted with a radio workshop. On the last day of action, a Metzineres member participated with a video as an initiative for a public event on sexual and reproductive health, giving her perspective on the impact of structural violence and stigma on accessing medical services as a woman who use drugs.

Seychelles



The Seychelles drug user network elected to introduce campaign activity during Ministry of Health gathering on December 1. Network members, including the sub-committee of women who use drugs, met with the National AIDS Commission NAC Secretariat, nurses and doctors, to introduce campaign materials and messages.

EuroNPUD and Youth RISE



EuroNPUD Women took part in the 16 Days of action, sharing on posters, speeches and global campaign slogans for the elimination of violence against women who use drugs in Italy, Lithuania, Barcelona and Greece. A specially designed EuroNPUD [Facebook profile frame](#) was much liked and well used in Greece and elsewhere in Europe. Before the end of the year, EuroNPUD plan to release a video documenting campaign efforts.

Youth RISE members similarly collaborated to support and [highlight](#) campaign involvement in Lithuania, Barcelona and Nigeria.

