



For Immediate Release

### Media Advisory

**Malaysia Deputy Law Minister Ramkarpal Singh to address the 27th Harm Reduction International Conference (HR23) in Melbourne, Australia**

**Conference will feature breaking news on fentanyl drug testing in New York, hepatitis C cure and reinfection in NSW prisons and results from the first-ever controlled trial conducted at a Medically Supervised Injection Room**

**Former New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark and former President of South Africa Kgalema Motlanthe to also address the event**

**Wednesday, 12 April 2023 (Melbourne, Australia)** – Malaysia’s Deputy Law Minister **Ramkarpal Singh** will address delegates attending the [27th Harm Reduction International Conference \(HR23\)](#) only weeks after the Malaysian government voted to abolish the mandatory death penalty for serious crimes.

Singh will speak at a high-level event on the death penalty on Monday, 17 April and will be joined by a number of experts including **Helen Clark**, former New Zealand Prime Minister and Chair of the [Global Commission on Drug Policy](#) (“The Global Commission”) and a member of the [International Commission Against the Death Penalty](#).

Former President of South Africa and member of the Global Commission **Kgalema Motlanthe** will also address HR23, which is being held at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre, Australia on April 16-19. The biennial conference, convened by [Harm Reduction International \(HRI\)](#) is expected to attract over a thousand researchers, policy makers, health workers, civil society organisations and activists from over 80 countries. The conference was last held in

Australia in 2004. Former Premier of Western Australia and member of the Global Commission **Geoffrey Gallop** will also attend the conference.

**All three Commissioners will address in person the Official Opening Press Conference on Sunday, 16 April at 13.30 AEDT (See details below)**

As members of the Global Commission, Motlanthe, Clark and Gallop are joined by another 26 commissioners, including former Colombian President **Juan Manuel Santos** and former Mexican President **Ernesto Zedillo**, as well as high profile figures including Virgin Founder **Sir Richard Branson**, the former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights **Louise Arbour** and the Immediate Past President of the International AIDS Society **Adeeba Kamarulzaman**. Former U.S. Secretary of State **George Schultz**, former Chairman of the United States Federal Reserve **Paul Volcker** and the former Secretary-General of the United Nations and Nobel Laureate **Kofi Annan**, have also been past members of the Global Commission over the past decade.

The Global Commission advocates for drug policies based on scientific evidence, human rights, public health and security.

Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Minister of Health **Rachel Stephen-Smith** will also address the conference. In October of last year, the ACT government passed legislation decriminalising small amounts of commonly used illicit drugs. The new law – a first in any Australian jurisdiction – will come into effect in late October this year.

HR23 is taking place at a time of reform and progress in drug policy in a number of Australian states and the Southeast Asia region.

Australia was an early and strong adopter of harm reduction and stands as an example of good harm reduction practice, with an extensive network of needle and syringe programmes, access to pharmacotherapy options and, more recently, naloxone, robust viral hepatitis testing and treatment, as well as two medically supervised injecting centres (also known as drug consumption rooms or overdose prevention centres). Despite this long history of harm reduction-focused policy and practice, reform in some spheres – for example pill testing, heroin prescription programmes, decriminalisation of personal use and possession of drugs, and prison-based needle and syringe programmes – is still a challenge in Australia.

The recent decision by the Victorian State government to grant the North Richmond Community Health Medically Supervised Injection Room permanent ongoing status has brought into focus the public health benefits of providing such a service.

[The HR23 conference programme](#) will feature the results of the first-ever controlled trial conducted at the Drug Consumption Rooms in Paris and Strasbourg that compares the behaviours of people who inject drugs in those centres with people who live in the cities of Bordeaux and Marseille where no drug consumption centres exist.

HR23 will also feature breaking scientific news including the results of a groundbreaking fentanyl drug checking study undertaken in the U.S and new data that reveals alarming rates of hepatitis C cure and reinfection in NSW Prisons.

There will also be a special session on chemsex and presentations from Ukrainian civil society representatives on the impact of the Russian invasion on the delivery of critical health services such as HIV antiretrovirals, hepatitis medicines, sterile syringes and methadone.

Reinforcing the conference theme of *Strength in Solidarity*, HRI will partner on the event with four Australian civil society and professional health organisations: Harm Reduction Victoria, the Australian Injecting and Illicit Drug Users League (AIVL), The Australasian Society of the Study of HIV, Viral Hepatitis and Sexual Health Medicine (ASHM) and the International Network on Health and Hepatitis in Substance Users (INHSU).

ENDS

**Media Registration:** To attend onsite or virtually accredited media can register [here](#)

**What:** Official Opening Press Conference (hybrid)

**When:** Sunday, 16 April at 13:30-14:30 AEDT

**Where:** Press Conference Room (Room 214), 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre

Virtual: [https://us06web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_K4uMR7x\\_S6KpLnheODhe7Q](https://us06web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_K4uMR7x_S6KpLnheODhe7Q)

**Who:**

**Naomi Burke-Shyne**, Executive Director, Harm Reduction International (Chair)  
**Jason Grebeley**, Head, Hepatitis C and Drug Use Group, Kirby Institute, Australia  
**Helen Clark**, Chair, Global Commission on Drug Policy, New Zealand  
**Kgalema Motlanthe**, Commissioner, Global Commission on Drug Policy  
**Sione Crawford**, Chief Executive Officer, Harm Reduction Victoria, Australia  
**Rachel Stephen-Smith**, Minister for Health, ACT Government, Australia  
**Geoff Gallop**, Commissioner, Global Commission on Drug Policy, Australia  
**Aditia Taslim**, International Network of People who Use Drugs, Indonesia

**Further Information:**

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**About HRI**

[Harm Reduction International \(HRI\)](#) is an international NGO which works to use data and advocacy to promote harm reduction, drug policy reform, and demonstrate how rights-based, evidence-informed responses to drugs contribute to healthier, safer societies. It has convened the Harm Reduction International Conference since 1990.