

ANNUAL REPORT 2023

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1.

WHO WE ARE

1. WHO WE ARE

VISION

A world in which drug policies uphold dignity, health and rights.

MISSION

We use data and advocacy to promote harm reduction and drug policy reform.

We show how rights-based, evidence-informed responses to drugs contribute to healthier, safer societies, and why investing in harm reduction makes sense.

WHO WE ARE

We are an NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations (UN). We collaborate and partner with allies to strengthen harm reduction, human rights and drug policy around the world. These activities support the achievement of the organisation's vision and mission. To advance our UN level advocacy, HRI contributes to the Vienna NGO Committee on Drugs, the UNODC Civil Society Group on Drug Use and HIV, and the World Health Organization Working Group on Hepatitis and Substance Use. HRI is an invited, expert member of the Strategic Coordination Group to the UN on HIV and Drug Use (SCG). We also contribute to the European Union (EU) Civil Society Forum on Drugs, Geneva Global Health Hub (G2H2), the United Kingdom Enhanced Harm Reduction Working Group, the Correlation European Harm Reduction Network, and the Civil Society Alliance for Human Rights in the Pandemic Treaty. We are members of STOPAIDS, the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty, and the Global Fund Advocates Network (GFAN).

2.

WHAT WE DO

2. WHAT WE DO

We advocate for an inclusive definition of harm reduction that emphasises non-judgmental, evidence-based health interventions and is grounded in justice.

We are committed to centring equity across our work and highlighting the negative impact of criminalisation and the compounding effects of intersectional vulnerabilities, specifically how drug policy interacts with gender, ethnicity, race, poverty and socioeconomic status.

WHAT IS HARM REDUCTION?

Harm reduction refers to policies, programmes and practices that aim to minimise the negative health, social and legal impacts associated with drug use, drug policies and drug laws.

Harm reduction is grounded in justice and human rights. It focuses on positive change and on working with people without judgement, coercion, discrimination, or requiring that they stop using drugs as a precondition of support.

OUR WORK

- We strengthen support for harm reduction through partnerships at international, regional and national levels.
- We convene at Harm Reduction International events for learning, sharing, activism and solidarity.
- We challenge the disproportionate impact of drug control on Black, Brown, Indigenous and ethnic minority individuals and communities.
- We use data and analysis to advocate for increasing funding for harm reduction.
- We connect and collaborate with allies in health and social justice movements.
- We use international human rights standards to challenge rights violations committed in the name of drug control.

OUR GOALS

- Harm reduction is accepted, community-led and adequately funded.
- Drug policy advances human rights, racial and social justice.
- The harm reduction and drug policy reform movements are characterised by solidarity, equity and evidence.

2.

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Naomi Burke-Shyne
Executive Director

2023 was a special year for us. For the first time in four years, we were able to convene the Harm Reduction International Conference (HR23) in Melbourne, Australia in April. We brought together over 1,000 people from around the world and awarded over 60 scholarships to people who use drugs, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and people from Asia, Africa, Latin America and Eurasia.

It has been over thirty years since our very first conference in Liverpool in 1990. That conference - and the 26 conferences that followed - helped to spread the principles of harm reduction, share knowledge and experience, and build networks of harm reduction practitioners and activists working for health and justice. We continued this history of convening the movement at HR23 under the theme 'Strength in Solidarity' which had particular resonance as we all emerged from the pandemic. The conference made waves in the media, with critical progress on safer consumption sites, drug checking and reforms to end the death penalty for drug offences widely covered in local, national, regional and international news.

The Harm Reduction International team continued to work resolutely for the abolition of the death penalty for drug offences. We track the death penalty, use this data to inform advocacy to hold governments to account at the international level, and lead work revealing the disproportionate impact of the death penalty on women and foreign nationals. We collaborate with partners around the world to coordinate international responses to threats of imminent execution.

2023 also marked the launch of our Divest/Invest campaign calling on donors and governments to divest from the unjust drug war and invest in programmes that prioritise community, health and justice. For many years HRI has been at the forefront of challenging the estimated \$100 billion that's spent annually on drug control – an amount which dwarfs the \$131 million spent on harm reduction in low- and middle-income countries. Punitive drug control disproportionately targets Black, Brown and Indigenous people and people pushed to the margins of society. We are calling for an end to funding streams for punitive and racist systems and demanding investment in community, health and justice.

We increased our focus on challenging the harms that result from incarceration. We led research on access to harm reduction services for people who use drugs in prisons and other closed settings to address the urgent needs of people detained. Our ongoing advocacy calls for decarceration to radically reduce the number of people in prison. This is in line with our long-term vision for a world which does not default to incarceration as a response to drugs; a world in which drug policies uphold dignity, health and rights. Our partnerships with prison advocates, the Lawyering on the Margins Network, parliamentarians, community, civil society and the UN inspire us and drive us to continue to shape a future in line with our ambitious goals.

We mark three years of working to be actively anti-racist, in line with our 2021 organisational pledge. Our Anti-Racist Pledge informs our approach to convening and our work to secure visas for conference delegates; it shapes the way we interrogate data and our advocacy priorities. Finally, it has strengthened our internal ways of working - our learning, our governance, and how we care for each other and our partners.

Progress in harm reduction and drug policy reform is strong but, as with all work for health and justice, is threatened by geopolitical tensions. We are cognisant 2023 ended with unprecedented violence in Gaza, and ongoing conflict in Ukraine, Sudan, Afghanistan, Myanmar and tens of other countries around the world. We stand in solidarity with human rights defenders around the world and renew our efforts towards dignity, health and rights.

3.

OUR WORK AND IMPACT

HR23: CONVENING FOR STRENGTH AND SOLIDARITY

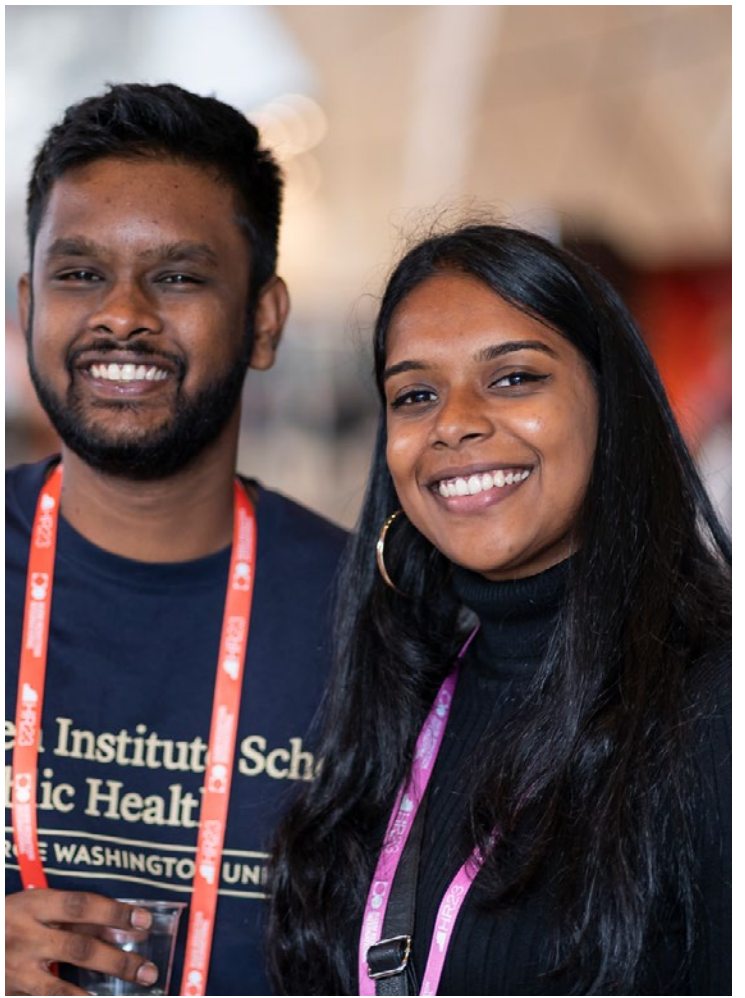
Our conferences have helped to put harm reduction on the map for over thirty years. We platform thought leaders, amplify advocacy for change, and shine a light on local innovations in harm reduction to make the case for harm reduction worldwide.

We convened the Harm Reduction International Conference 2023 (HR23) in Melbourne, Australia in April 2023. The conference took place on the land of the Bunurong Boon Wurrung and Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung peoples of the Eastern Kulin Nation.

HR23 was our most expansive and intersectional conference yet. The theme of the conference ‘Strength in Solidarity’ shaped the event and thread through the plenaries, panels, workshops and dialogue space.

The conference catalysed the uptake of drug checking services around Australia and boosted political engagement on harm reduction in Victoria, New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory. Former Prime Minister Helen Clark and our Executive Director Naomi Burke-Shyne led the first ever media tour of the Melbourne overdose prevention centre – shining a light on the life-saving services and person-centred healthcare available to clients. We highlighted leadership on the latest reforms to capital punishment for drug offences in Malaysia, showcased groundbreaking French research on the health and public order benefits of overdose prevention sites, and hosted the launch of a USD31 million investment in viral hepatitis and harm reduction by Unitaid.





1000+ DELEGATES

60 COUNTRIES

97% OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS RATED HR23 SPEAKERS AS 'EXCELLENT' OR 'VERY GOOD'

95% OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS THOUGHT THAT THE SESSIONS AND TOPICS WERE USEFUL FOR THEIR WORK

86% OF RESPONDENTS SAID THAT THEY WOULD MAKE CHANGES TO THEIR WORK PRACTICES BASED ON WHAT THEY LEARNED AT HR23

**HIGH-LEVEL
SPEAKERS**

**The Right Honourable
Helen Clark**
Former Prime Minister of
Aotearoa New Zealand

**His Excellency
Kgalema Motlanthe**
Former President of
South Africa

**The Hon.
Gabrielle Williams**
MP, Minister for Mental
Health of Victoria

**The Hon.
Rose Jackson**
MLC, Minister for
Mental Health of New
South Wales

**The Hon.
Geoff Gallop**
Former Premier of
Western Australia

**Lord Mayor
of Melbourne**
Sally Capp

**The Hon.
Rachel Stephen-Smith**
MLA, Minister for Health
of the Australian Capital
Territory



Study: French Drug Injection Rooms Cut ER Visits And Crime

By Bao Su Lyn | 25 April 2023

A French study on drug consumption rooms (DCCs) in Paris and Strasbourg – where people inject drugs safely – shows less overdose, shared needles, abscesses, ER visits, public drug use, and crime, compared to cities without DCCs.



[Read article](#)



'You almost died': Safe drug use saves lives in Australia

Melbourne's first Medically Supervised Injecting Rooms (MSIR) has courted controversy but is estimated to have saved 69 people dying from drug use.



Now clean of drugs and ready to buy a home with his fiancée, Scottie Melk says his life was saved by medical staff at MSIR in North Richmond, Melbourne, Australia (courtesy of former Ashby victim Reductus International)

By Sen Nguyen
29 Apr 2023

[Read article](#)



Experts urge Victoria to provide promised CBD safe injecting room or risk further harm to vulnerable people

Andrews government bought a Flinders Street site for \$40m in 2021 but it has sat empty since

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Denita Kolovos and Eden Gillespie

17 April 2023 10:07 AM



Victoria risks falling behind the rest of the world if it fails to expand on the success of its safe injecting room in Richmond, according to the head of an international harm minimisation group.

The executive director of London-based Harm Reduction International, Naomi Burke-Smyrne, is in Melbourne for the organisation's annual conference and has called on the Andrews government to provide a promised second

[Read article](#)



Most Drug Policies Are Based On 'Stigma And Lies': Harm Reduction International

By Bao Su Lyn | 17 April 2023

HRI executive director Naomi Burke-Smyrne says 'stigma and lies' are the basis of most public policy on drugs. "Because there is so much scaremongering on drugs, many people have bought into the un-informed idea that drug use is bad, rather than drug policy is bad."



[Read article](#)



Reforms 'can't end' with legalised cannabis

Former NZ PM calls for death penalty solution, saying harm-reduction services go a long way in addressing drug abuse and addiction issues

UNLEASHED: IS ANTI-DRUG PUNISHMENT THE ANSWER TO A NEW ZEALAND'S DRUG PROBLEM? NEWS
WIKIPIEDIA: ANTI-DRUG PUNISHMENT IS INEFFECTIVE



Heide Clark, former Prime Minister of New Zealand and HRI board member

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HR23 served as a platform for Indigenous people from around the world to meet and boost the work of the Indigenous Drug Policy Alliance.

The conference provided space for the inaugural meeting of the Blak harm reduction network with support from the International Indigenous Drug Policy Alliance. This Australian network aims to build dialogue that centres the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in drug policy reform and harm reduction services.

Media coverage of HR23 was the most extensive for at least 15 years, with wide-ranging coverage on the national, regional and international level. There were dozens of pieces across online and print media, radio and podcasts, and leading media outlets. HR23 made it to the prestigious Radio National Breakfast Show and TV's 7.30 Report, *The Guardian Australia*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *Australian Associated Press*, *The Daily Telegraph*, and *The Australian*. Several stories were featured in international outlets including the *Washington Post*.

Hosting the Harm Reduction International Conference is a collaborative effort between HRI and our partners in the host country, who we rely on for essential local knowledge, connections and experience. HR23 was co-hosted by local organisations, Harm Reduction Victoria (HRVic), the Australian Injecting & Illicit Drug Users League (AIVL), the Australasian Society for HIV, Viral Hepatitis and Sexual Health Medicine (ASHM) and the International Network on Health and Hepatitis in Substance Users (INHSU).





DIVEST/INVEST: A CAMPAIGN FOR COMMUNITY, HEALTH AND JUSTICE

For many years, Harm Reduction International has tracked innovations in public health and funding for harm reduction. We know that harm reduction services are both effective and cost-effective. Yet governments and donors around the world continue to waste vast amounts of money on punitive responses to drugs, with little transparency or accountability.

We launched our Divest/Invest campaign in 2023 which builds on our past advocacy for a divestment from the drug war and an investment in harm reduction, social and community programmes.

People working on racial justice, criminal legal reform, decolonising global health, women's rights, sex workers' rights, and LGBTQIA+ rights are our natural allies in challenging systems of oppression, exclusion, criminalisation, stigma and discrimination. With this campaign, we are working to build a broad and diverse coalition of people from allied social justice movements calling on governments and donors to divest from punitive approaches. When we divest from the drug war, we free up essential funds to invest in more effective approaches which can lead to healthier, safer societies.

We launched www.investinjustice.net to house campaign materials including new videos and case studies from India, Jamaica and the US illustrating examples of communities divesting from punitive approaches.

\$1bn in aid has been used to support failed 'war on drugs' over past decade, says report

Funding tied to drug prevention programmes given to 92 lower-income countries, including Afghanistan after the Taliban takeover



Taliban officials destroy an opium poppy plantation in Kandahar, Afghanistan, in April. Photograph: Samullah Soem/AFP/Getty Images
Almost \$1bn (£800m) of aid has been spent on a global "war on drugs" over the past decade that has fuelled human rights abuses, according to a new report.

[Read article](#)

GLOBAL VIEWS | DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE

Opinion: Narcotics control has no place in the future of aid

Development, like drug policy, must be decolonized – and aid for the war on drugs must be left in the past.

By Naomi Burke-Shyne // 14 September 2023



When you think about international aid, and what it pays for, you're more likely to picture things such as schools and hospitals than armed police officers and prisons. For good reason: international aid funding is supposed to help end poverty and support development. It is not supposed to cause harm.

These essential principles are regularly repeated by donors in their own policy documents, commitments, and public statements. However, wealthy countries spent close to \$1 billion of aid funding on the global war on drugs in the decade between 2012 and 2021.

[Read article](#)

INVEST IN JUSTICE

Wealthy countries spent close to \$1 billion of international aid funding on the global war on drugs between 2012 and 2021.

HARM REDUCTION INTERNATIONAL | www.investinjustice.net

DIVEST FROM THE UNJUST DRUG WAR

INVEST IN JUSTICE

HARM REDUCTION INTERNATIONAL | www.investinjustice.net

INVEST IN JUSTICE

Labour rights	School feeding projects	Narcotics control
\$198 million	\$286 million	\$323 million

In 2021, more aid money was spent on narcotics control than school feeding projects or labour rights.

HARM REDUCTION INTERNATIONAL | www.investinjustice.net

INVEST IN JUSTICE

Aid spent on the war on drugs from 2012-2021

United States	\$550 million
European Union	\$282 million
Japan	\$78 million
United Kingdom	\$22 million
Germany	\$12 million

Source: Organized by Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)

HARM REDUCTION INTERNATIONAL | www.investinjustice.net

A campaign highlight to date has been our research revealing that wealthy governments spent close to \$1 billion from their aid budgets on the global war on drugs, between 2012 and 2021. Despite overwhelming evidence in favour of following a health and human rights-based approach to drug policy, vast amounts of international funding has gone to punitive and damaging drug control instead. International aid funding is supposed to help end poverty and support development. It is not supposed to cause harm. Using it for punitive drug policies undermines efforts to advance health and development outcomes.

Our report, *Aid for the War on Drugs*, follows aid money for narcotics control. The report included clear actions and recommendations for governments, civil society, journalists, taxpayers, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and for international donors.

The report got extensive press coverage, findings have been presented to governments, UN agencies, academia and civil society, and will form the foundation for our ongoing advocacy to challenge the use of taxpayer dollars for activities that harm society.

INTEGRATING HEPATITIS AND HARM REDUCTION

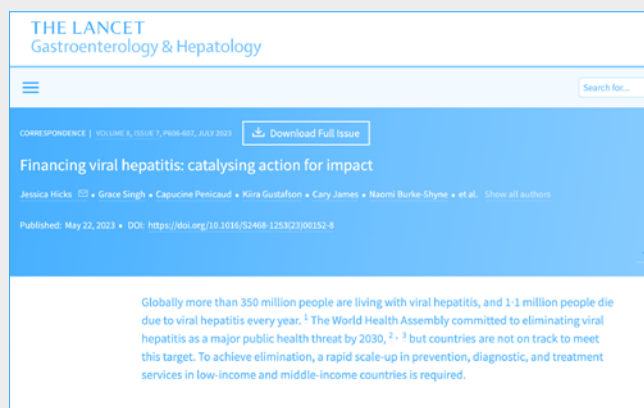
People who use drugs are at greater risk of acquiring hepatitis B and C. This can be related to sharing drug use equipment as well as through sexual activities. Harm reduction interventions are essential to the global commitment to eliminate hepatitis C by 2030.

Harm Reduction International's work at the intersection of viral hepatitis and harm reduction has supported an important surge of action towards 2030 global targets for viral hepatitis elimination.

With Burnet Institute and partners, we convened more than 100 experts at a pre-conference event on the sidelines of the Harm Reduction International Conference 2023. The event disseminated global data and guidelines, and supported strategic planning to integrate hepatitis interventions into HIV programmes.

Our Viral Hepatitis Data repository, undertaken with the support of the World Health Organization (WHO), remains an essential global source of data for advocacy.

We joined forces with the World Hepatitis Alliance and the Clinton Health Access Initiative in a Commentary in the [*Lancet*](#) urging all funders working with affected communities and specifically in HIV, harm reduction, and maternal and child health, to integrate viral hepatitis into their programmes to ensure that they are supporting equitable, people-centred programming.



[↗ Read article](#)

We focused much of our advocacy on making the case for investment in hepatitis and harm reduction, contributing to real changes in the services available around the world:

- We worked with partners in a number of countries including Mauritius, Bangladesh and Nigeria to ensure hepatitis programming was integrated into budgets under upcoming grants from the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria – a concrete step towards better health outcomes for people who use drugs.
- At the first-ever Global Hepatitis Resource Mobilization Conference, we moderated discussions with government representatives on the integration of hepatitis prevention and treatment into harm reduction and HIV services.

In 2023, we mapped the use of low dead space syringes around the world, considering client preferences and the available evidence of effectiveness. Our research concludes that low dead space syringes could be a cost-effective tool to decrease HIV and HCV prevalence among people who inject drugs. We will be using this research in our advocacy, to ensure that people who use drugs and those who implement services are aware of commodities that could help reduce the burden of disease.

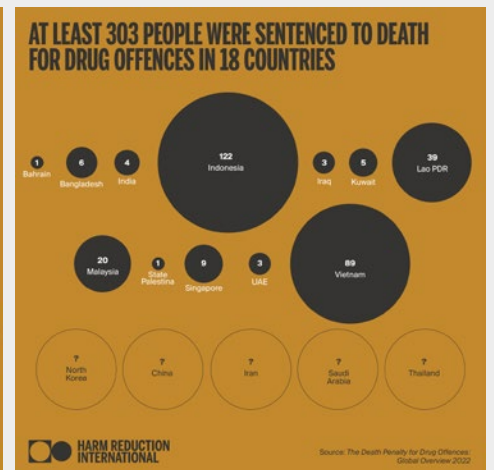
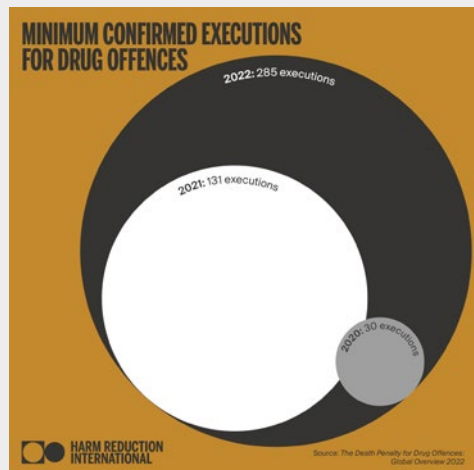
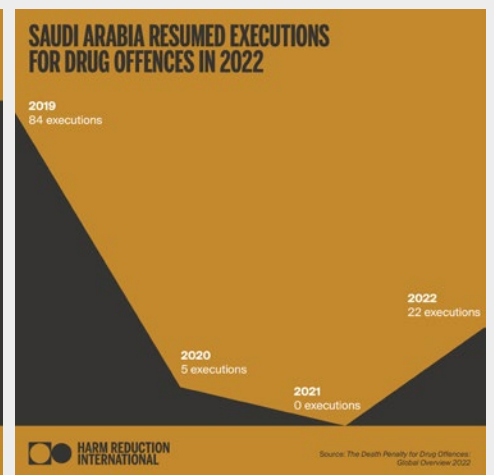
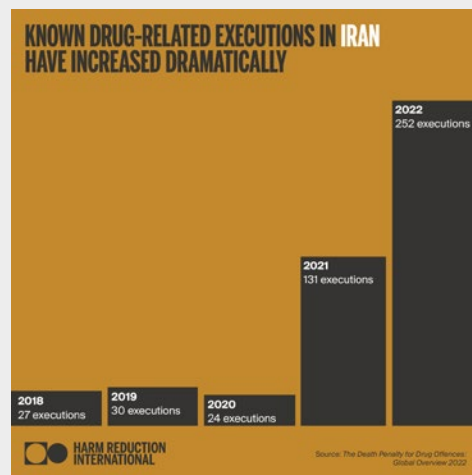
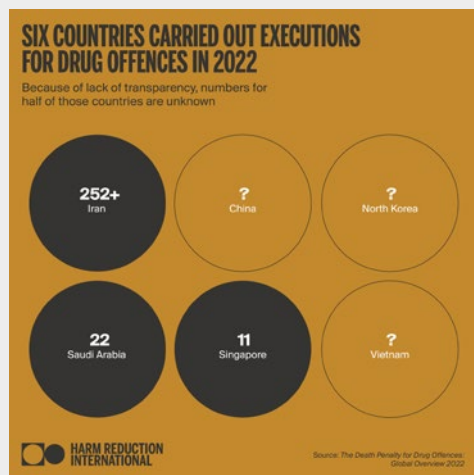
BRIDGING THE DIVIDE BETWEEN THE DRUG POLICY AND HUMAN RIGHTS SECTORS

We know that drug policy is a matter of human rights. Drug laws and policies infringe the human rights of people who use or are involved with drugs. Our advocacy places human rights at the centre of a harm reduction approach to drug laws and policies, recognising that punitive laws and policies are detrimental to health and safety, and the realisation of human rights for all.

In 2023 we pushed for drug policy to be included in human rights discussions at the international level. We produce regular briefings which highlight opportunities for communities and civil society around the world to engage with international human rights mechanisms about matters of drug policy. This work ensures diverse voices are heard by Member States at the UN Human Rights Council and plays a critical role in the shaping of human rights norms and standards.

We collaborated with partners to make over 20 statements and submissions to UN bodies highlighting human rights violations committed in the name of the war on drugs. Our statements emphasise racial justice, the rights of people deprived of liberty, and the overreach of police powers in the name of drug control. These resources are helping to mainstream drug policy within human rights discussions.

We have monitored the use of the death penalty for drug offences worldwide since our first ground-breaking publication on this issue in 2007. Our unique global monitoring calls for accountability and ongoing work with partners for the abolition of the death penalty for drug offences remain vitally relevant. We brought together an incredible line-up of speakers at a high-level side event held during HR23. The panel was opened by His Excellency Tsakhia Elbegdorj, Former President of Mongolia and Commissioner, International Commission against the Death Penalty. He gave a powerful address which recounted his country's journey to abolishing the death penalty. We were also joined by Malaysia's Minister of Law Deputy Minister of Law, Ramkarpal Singh. His HR23 address came on the heels of historic reform in the country, as Malaysia's Parliament officially abolished the mandatory death penalty days before the conference.



CONNECTING THE DOTS BETWEEN INTERNATIONAL AND DOMESTIC HARM REDUCTION

We are the only NGO tracking global harm reduction funding trends, including finance from both international donors and domestic governments. Our work supports efforts to hold donors to account and reveals where more investment is required. Funding has a direct impact on the availability and quality of services for people who use drugs around the world.

Along with UNAIDS, Rumah Cemara (Indonesia), Vocal Kenya, the South African Network of People Who Use Drugs (SANPUD), Recovering Nepal and YouthRISE Nigeria, we convened government leaders the National Leaders Convening in June 2023. This was the first gathering of its kind. It focused on strengthening shared ambition for increased domestic investment in national harm reduction responses.

The National Leaders Convening created space for distinguished speakers including government officials and community and civil society leaders to engage in closed-door discussions to address opportunities for, and barriers to domestic public financing for harm reduction. The convening consolidated commitments to addressing the funding gap for harm reduction; and facilitated discussion on better utilisation of existing funds.

Our flagship publication, the *Global State of Harm Reduction* is published every two years. In the years between the full report, we undertake a key data update to ensure that advocates and international agencies are equipped with the most up to date information on harm reduction services and policy around the world. In 2023, we reported a number of important developments. We found that:

- Colombia opened a new drug consumption room (DCR) in Bogotá bringing the global tally of DCRs to 17; the past five years have seen a surge in the initiation of these life-saving services.
- Two new countries (Colombia and Moldova) began peer distribution of naloxone.
- Egypt commenced implementation of opioid agonist therapy (OAT) programmes for the first time.
- One country (Ukraine) began implementing needle and syringe programmes (NSP) in prison.
- The total number of countries that include explicit supportive references to harm reduction in national policy documents increased by four, from 105 to 109.

As part of our work to connect the dots between the international and national levels, we supported efforts to strengthen and scale up harm reduction programmes in Bangladesh, Mauritius and Nigeria, via a strategic initiative by The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria for technical assistance. We presented more than 50 national government representatives from around the world with good practice examples of overdose prevention at the Expert Group Meeting of the Global Partnership on Drug Policies and Development. We co-hosted this meeting with the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation, the International Drug Policy Consortium and the Thai Office of Narcotics Control Board.

4.

OUR BOARD OF TRUSTEES

4. OUR BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Harm Reduction International is an international, not-for-profit NGO. It is a charitable company limited by guarantee, meaning it is incorporated and registered with the UK Charity Commission (Charity Number – 1117375) and at Companies House (Company number – 3223265).

We are governed by a Board of Trustees that is elected for a three year term. We follow a Foundations Model of governance, in which the directors are also the members of the organisation. Board appointments are made by resolution of the Board itself.

OUR BOARD OF TRUSTEES 2023 WERE

- **Lucy Burns**
Chair
- **John Porter**
Treasurer
- **Kojo Koram**
Secretary
(until September 2023)
- **Fany Pineda Miranda**
(appointed September 2023)

-
- **William Pick**
(appointed September 2023)
 - **Alexander Stevens**
 - **Olga Belyaeva**
(until September 2023)
 - **Oluseyi Kehinde**
 - **Raminta Stuikyte**

5.

OUR DONORS

5. OUR DONORS

In 2023, Harm Reduction International benefitted from the support of:

● **Open Society Foundations**

● **Elton John AIDS Foundation**

● **The Robert Carr Fund**

● **The Global Fund to Fight AIDS,
Tuberculosis and Malaria**

● **Médecins du Monde**

● **Unitaid**

This is in addition to collaboration and partnerships with the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS), the World Health Organization, and the UN Office of Drugs and Crime.

6.

OUR TEAM

6. OUR TEAM



Naomi Burke-Shyne
Executive Director



Colleen Daniels
Deputy Director



Anne Taiwo
Finance Manager



Ajeng Larasati
Human Rights Lead



Catherine Cook
Sustainable Financing
Lead



Cinzia Brentari
Senior Advisor



Gaj Gurung
Research and Policy
Analyst



Giada Girelli
Senior Human Rights
Analyst



Lucy O'Hare
Conference Director



Maddie O'Hare
Conference Director



Marcela Jofre
Human Rights Analyst



Suchitra Rajagopalan
Communications Strategist



Paulina Cortez Licona
Project Coordinator



Ugochi Egwu
Finance Assistant

HARM REDUCTION INTERNATIONAL ANNUAL REPORT 2023

