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Georgios Bardanis  
President of KETHEA  
CC: Vice-President of KETHEA, Kostas Arvanitis  
Director, Vasilis Gkitakos  
KETHEA members

[TO BE ADDED]

**Subject: Concerns about drug consumption rooms**

Dear Mr. Bardanis,

The International Drug Policy Consortium (IDPC) is a global network of more than 170 NGOs coming together to promote drug policies based on health, human rights, development, social inclusion and civil society participation.

On behalf of the network, we wish to raise concerns around KETHEA's press release dating from 30/5/2017, entitled: 'Drug Consumption Rooms: a controversial and piecemeal measure', in which the organisation expressed its opposition and made 'very serious reservations' regarding the operation of drug consumption rooms.

There are currently over 96 drug consumption rooms worldwide, most of which in Europe, in countries as diverse as Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, France, Norway, Luxemburg, Switzerland, Belgium, etc. These professionally-supervised facilities offer a safe space for hard-to-reach or marginalised people to use drugs in a safe environment, instead of in risky and unhygienic conditions. The latest facilities to have opened were in France and Canada, with the full political and financial support of the French and Canadian governments. In both contexts, this was accompanied by a review of national laws and policies to facilitate the good functioning of these life-saving facilities.

Having operated for over 30 years, there is now ample evidence of effectiveness regarding drug consumption rooms. The establishment of these facilities was primarily driven by both health and safety concerns in areas with large and problematic open drug scenes. The objective is two-fold: reduce morbidity and mortality among people who use drugs; and reduce public drug use and harms to the general public posed by discarded needles.

The International Narcotics Control Board also confirmed that these facilities are functioning in accordance with the international drug control conventions, provided that their 'ultimate objective (...) is to reduce the adverse consequences of drug abuse without condoning or encouraging drug

trafficking. Accordingly, any such facility must provide, or refer patients to, treatment, rehabilitation and social reintegration measures' (INCB Annual Report 2016).

The European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction itself has conducted a number of studies on the impacts of drug consumption rooms across Europe ([more information](#)). It found that these facilities have been proven to:

- Reach and stay in contact with highly marginalised populations and improve safer drug use
- Reduce risky injecting behaviour such as needle sharing – thereby reducing the risks of HIV transmission
- Respond swiftly and effectively to overdoses, with a health team on site ready to intervene whenever necessary. Evidence shows that there has never been an overdose death on the premises of a drug consumption room
- Increase uptake of both detoxification and drug dependence treatment (including opioid substitution therapy), by providing a bridge between highly marginalised groups and healthcare services
- Decrease public injecting and reduce the number of syringes discarded in the vicinity – thereby improving public safety
- Not lead to an increase in drug use or drug-related crime in the vicinity of the facility.

Drug use in Greece continues to be associated with relatively high HIV infections and risks of overdoses – with an increase in the number of overdose deaths since 2013, reaching 94 deaths in 2015 (Country Drug Report – Greece, EMCDDA, 2017). In Athens, the open drug scene is expanding, with over 50% of homeless people being dependent on drugs and using regularly in the street. This situation, coupled with reduced access to clean needles, lack of shelters for the homeless, and lack of adequate training for medical professionals to respond to emergency situations (including overdoses) will most likely result in an exponential number of preventable deaths.

In this context, drug consumption rooms would have an invaluable impact in the lives of people who use drugs, and for the general public. The brief opening of ODYSSEAS was a step in the right direction – a step that was welcomed and supported both by Mr. Giorgos Kaminis, Mayor of Athens, and Mr. Andreas Xanthos, the Minister of Health.

Based on global evidence of effectiveness, we therefore call on KETHEA to publicly endorse and support the opening of drug consumption rooms in Athens and the rest of the country, and call on the Greek government to review any legislation that are currently posing a barrier to opening such facilities.

We look forward to your response and immediate action, and remain at your disposal for any questions or concerns you may have on this issue.

Yours faithfully,

Ann Fordham, Executive Director

On behalf of the 177 members of the International Drug Policy Consortium