

**Press release  
For immediate release**

**Horse trading at the UN – Elections to Narcotics Control Board compromise its independence**

NGOs in the drug policy field have criticised the outcome of the recent elections to the United Nation's International Narcotic Control Board (INCB) because the process of trading votes between member states has led to the exclusion of some of the most highly qualified candidates, and the re-election of at least one candidate who does not fit the stated criteria, Tatyana Dmitrieva.

Civil Society speaks out

Mike Trace, Chair of the International Drug Policy Consortium and former deputy UK drugs tsar states: 'Tatyana Dmitrieva holds advisory positions to the Russian Ministry of Health and has repeatedly used her membership of the INCB to support the Russian government's position against the provision of opiate substitution treatment for illicit heroin users. This contradicts international drug and health control agencies – including the UN Office on Drugs and Crime and the World Health Organisation -- and even the official position of the INCB itself. Our members have pointed this out to member states and the INCB, but despite these concerns member states have re-elected her for 5 years, and she has at the same time been appointed for one year as Vice President of the Board.'

Martin Jelsma, coordinator of the drugs programme of the Transnational Institute (TNI), a member organisation of IDPC, states: 'We are appalled to see that countries, including some that support a more humane approach to drug control, have treated these elections as part of a UN power game instead of focusing on the real issues at stake for global drug policy. This is a missed opportunity to bring the INCB closer in line with basic UN human rights principles and system-wide coherence on drug policy. Those countries that traded away their votes are responsible for politicising a UN body that is supposed to be a group of independent experts.'

Background

The INCB is a powerful UN Committee, established under the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, tasked with assessing member states' performance in controlling illegal drugs and making essential medicines available for medical use. Its competence and impartiality are therefore crucial in global efforts to develop effective drug policy, and to ensure the availability of essential medicines for pain relief and treatment of addiction.

Dmitrieva's proximity to the Russian government undermines the independence and impartiality of the INCB. In addition, her opposition to methadone prescription in Russia, despite substantial evidence of its effectiveness, highlights her unsuitability to serve on the INCB.

In fact, research conducted in many different countries has consistently shown the safety and efficacy of methadone, and established that it is one of the most effective treatment options for opiate dependence. The World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), and UNAIDS have jointly recommended that maintenance therapy, including with methadone and buprenorphine, be integrated into

national HIV/AIDS programs, both as an HIV/AIDS prevention measure and to support adherence to antiretroviral treatment and medical follow up for opiate dependent drug users.

The founding principles of the INCB include the stipulation that members should be 'persons who, by their competence, impartiality and disinterestedness, will command general confidence'. Specifically, they should have no loyalties or ties to any national government and, during their period of membership, hold no official government positions.

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