

Excellences, distinguished delegates, dear ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to share our experiences and thoughts with you today.

We, as youth, acknowledge that there is not only one single reason for why some of our peers start to experiment with harmful substances. Both our experience and scientific evidence tell us that many factors can unfortunately make people vulnerable to start using drugs. This can be due to difficulties in the family, poor or marginalized communities, easy accessibility of substances, genetics, lack of accurate scientific information available to young people or even social norms that are favourable towards drug use. Furthermore, some people start using substances as an escape from stress, pressures or mental health issues.

We, the participants of the youth forum 2015, have spent two days sharing our experiences with one another. It is clear that there is a lot we CAN do and that we ARE already doing to support our conviction and impact these factors of vulnerability. Therefore, we kindly ask you to support our efforts.

We need you, as policy makers, to invest in prevention. We urge you, for the well-being and safety of our future generations, to base your policies on scientific evidence and not on popular opinion.

We need to strengthen our common efforts to PREVENT substance abuse ensuring that these efforts are based on scientific understanding. It is crucial to support the development of emotional and social skills of the children and youth, to provide them

with a sustainable future perspective. Enabling them to have educational, professional and career possibilities, a life project.

It is understood that the availability of substances needs to be restricted. In addition, as a global community we need to become more accepting to the people who may partake in drug use and take action to support the members of our communities who have already suffered. We NEED to care for them! Treatment, not punishment. Support, not exclusion.

We need to provide opportunities to openly discuss this seemingly complicated matter, where we simplify and explain scientific aspects to young people. In addition, safe spaces for the struggling youth to seek advice must be established, to aid and support those in need. To ensure that drugs are not seen as the solution to personal issues. We need to create “CIRCLES OF TRUST” within the family, the peers, the schools, the community, to provide youth with confidence and skills to overcome these vulnerabilities. The services that will be provided need to be easily accessible within the society including our disadvantaged communities.

The Youth Forum has been a tremendous opportunity to learn from other engaged young people. However, such opportunities need to be expanded to other youths around the world, empowering them in their creative efforts to educate their peers, to support their health and to advocate with different stakeholders. Without a doubt it is this kind of capacity building that will sustain prevention efforts in the long term.

Although we already have a lot of capacity and experience, we call upon you to work with us, to share our passion and commitment in this important cause. Help us, give

us the tools, the roles and the opportunities for us to become meaningful participants. Together we CAN and we WILL change the situation in our communities and truly support the health and wellbeing of our peers. We are your future.

Thank you.