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**THE DRUG PROBLEM AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE EAST OF THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO**

**I. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE**

The consumption of psychoactive substances, in particular: tobacco, alcohol and drugs, is a real public health problem in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo, not only since it causes non-transmissible diseases such as cancer, hypertension, stroke and diabetes, but also the use of these substances is a factor promoting the spread of trasmissible diseases such as: HIV/AIDS, STDs, Hepatitis B and C, TBC...) and is at the origin of undesirable phenomena such as: sexual and gender-based violence, traffic accidents, crime, theft, rape, banditry (e.g. Kuluna phenomenon in Kinshasa), etc.).

According to studies conducted so far by the PNLCT with the support of its partners, 3% of Congolese children aged 10 to 19 are polydrug addicts and 11% with violent behavior (joint survey: Ministry of Health – WHO). HIV seroprevalence among drug users was 5.2% with an average of 3.5% in the City of Kinshasa. 26.3% of youth reported losing control in front of their partner after using the drug; 55.1% acknowledged that alcohol and drugs aroused them to sexual desire; 52.2 per cent had not used condoms the last time they had casual sex; ; 47.1% had high-risk intercourse in the past 3 months; 75.1% needed to give up substance abuse; 48.3% of young people needed medical care; 11.8% of psychosocial care and 9.3% use drugs in the workplace.

The east of the Democratic Republic of Congo, the provinces of North and South Kivu have been the prey for twenty years of armed men. Far from the capital Kinshasa, this area integrated into the Great Lakes region and bordering Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and Tanzania is relatively inaccessible with few roads and areas of dense forest: it is therefore isolated from the national government.

It has become a battleground for many armed groups, which are fighting over the vast natural resources of its subsoil. However, coltan, diamond, lithium for the manufacture of batteries for electric cars, cobalt, oil, cassiterite necessary for the manufacture of mobile phones, methane gas, the region has turned into a zone of anarchy where civilians are looted, raped and killed by sometimes undetermined groups.

In order to make the exploitation of minerals easy; multinationals in complicity with a few nationals resort to drug traffickers who operate in "Organized Crime" mode murdering the entire civilian population in their paths; thus creating a widespread fear that pushes people to move and leave mining areas free facilitating the exploitation of minerals in favor of multinationals.

The drugs commonly used are: cocaine, heroin, ecstasy, crack, cannabis, painkillers, amphetamines, strong alcoholic beverages...

This procedure is more used in North Kivu especially in the areas of BENI and ITURI where a terrorist group called ADF NALU operates ; A group of young drug addicts recruited from across the region and in search of easy enrichment. In order to veil their mission, this group covers themselves through the Muslim religion to which they claim to belong.

These young people are recruited among gangs in some of Congo's neighboring countries such as Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Kenya, Somalia and Tanzania, as well as some nationals.

According to testimonies given by some members of this group who were apprehended by the regular army; before any operation; They use a cocktail of drugs. They inject each other, they inhale and drink others to allow them to brave all fear and facilitate massacres because thanks to these drugs consciousness has no place and instinct takes over which is why the majority of them remain carefree up to three days of captivity and regain consciousness often on the fourth and 5th day.

All other groups use drugs as an instrument of motivation to facilitate them to commit crimes (killings, rapes, looting, violence...) Like the FDLR, the NGUMINO, the Raia MUTOMBOKI, in South Kivu; The M23 in North Kivu a group supported by Rwanda all in order to easily access valuable materials for the benefit of multinationals. Drug traffickers bring not only shipments of drugs but also weapons.

Let us understand that drug use contributes enormously to the violation of human rights in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

**II. DRUG POLICY IN THE REGION**

The situation of generalized insecurity, repeated wars, unemployment, extreme poverty... All these elements have led a large number of people, especially young people from the east of the the Democratic Republic of Congo to find refuge in drugs in order to escape all these realities. Unfortunately once inside, their situation becomes more and more complicated because the majority develop an addiction to substances with all the consequences that this implies.

After developing dependence, the majority of users find themselves neglected, discriminated against, abandoned to their sad fate. They are driven from their families because the local community does not see drug addiction as a disease but as a deliberate choice in a way. The majority of these users find refuge in the streets and in ghettos where they are confronted with several words such as HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, malaria, tuberculosis, hepatitis, certain cancers, famine, cold, death due to overdose, police repression, prison, mob justice ... They do not have access to any individual basic social services, whereas everyone should enjoy the right to equality and the right not to be discriminated . This means that all persons are equal before and under the law and are entitled without discrimination to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law. Everyone is entitled to the enjoyment of all human rights without discrimination on a range of grounds(including health status, including substance abuse).

Girls and women with substance addiction remain the most exposed/vulnerable. They suffer gang rapes, unwanted births, STIs... Children are not spared from this situation, they are thousands under dependence and the vast majority of them live on the streets.

The region has so far had no government programme to combat drugs and support users. Three non-governmental organizations are working in the region on drugs, while the national programme to combat drug addiction and toxic substances is already operational in the capital Kinshasa but never in the east.

So far the region has no detoxification centres, no risk reduction, , substitution care and socio-economic reintegration programmes and there are no specific programmes for imprisoned users; At the exit the majority become worse than before.

Prevention, which should be the pillar of the fight to enable the youngest to be informed about the dangers of drugs to health and peace, ... remains so far ineffective. Thousands of young people continue to fall into drug addiction because they do not know the harms of drugs.

Every day the region records several deaths due to overdose and other diseases among users while this can be avoided if there is state and community involvement.

**III. CONCLUSION**

On the one hand, drug use leads to the violation of human rights in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo because it is used as an instrument of motivation to commit several crimes and those who are used remain young people who have not benefited from the enjoyment of their rights in their respective countries ; This pushes them to become more radical and are willing to do anything to take revenge for the evil to which society has subjected them. On the one hand; These young people are victims of poor drug policies in their respective regions (repression, widespread poverty, lack of access to employment, no access to health, no access to socio-economic reintegration programs...). But also on the other hand these young people remain victims at all levels, especially in our region where these young people do not benefit from any protection from the government.

It is high time to rethink drug policies in the region and the applicability of human rights especially for drug users in order to save these young people abandoned to their sad fate.

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