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PRESS RELEASE

DRUG ADDICTION

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**POLICIES ON DRUG USE : THE NATIONAL AIDS
COUNCIL ONCE AGAIN ADVOCATES RISK REDUCTION
AS A PRIORITY**

The Public Health Bill is currently being debated and the National AIDS Council seizes the opportunity to stress once again how important it is to sustain policies designed to inform the public and to reduce drug related risks, particularly HIV infection risks. In this respect, the Council notes with satisfaction that risk reduction policies will shortly be legally ratified.

Prevention work, essentially carried out by associations, has these past ten years shown evidence of its unquestionable efficiency; in particular, the number of new infections among intravenous drug users has considerably decreased over the last decade. Moreover, risk reduction strategies have been beneficial not only to individuals but also to society, through a reduction of heroin consumption and trafficking, and a decrease in delinquency related to heroin dependence.

However, HIV infection still affects 15 % to 20% of drug users. Hepatitis viruses – especially hepatitis C which affects 50 % to 75% of drug users – add to the long list of diseases to which they are exposed. Prevention work and health care must therefore be continued and enhanced.

With the general context of declining prevention behaviours, there is now a real risk of a resurgence of the AIDS epidemic. But the legal framework created by the Law of December 31st 1970 on drug use is no longer adapted. As underscored by the Council in its report of June 21st 2001, the Law, wavering as it does between health care for drug users and criminal sanctions for narcotics use, does not enable the implementation of true risk reduction policies. On the contrary, it increases the dangers of the very behaviours it is supposed to curb.

The Council's conclusions, that propose a reappraisal of the Law, do not condemn or approve drug use, whose dangers it notes. They only advocate a clearly prioritized public health objective. Subsequently, those involved in risk reduction should not, as such, be liable to prosecution as is still too often the case. Lastly, beyond the need for a legal endorsement of risk reduction strategies and for the protection of those involved, the Council once again stresses the importance of long-term subsidies for interventions implemented to that end.