

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests,

I am honored to have the opportunity to be with you today and that I can share an important message about the problem which affects us all in a direct or indirect way, which is drug addiction problem.

My name is Boro Goic, I live and work in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and I am the founder and Chair of organization Celebrate Recovery.

In addition to that, I am Chair of RUN- Recovered Users Network, a drug policy platform operating on global levels and which brings together organizations led by recovered users.

I would say that prevention and recovery should be the main goals of our work. My main involvement is focused on the second part, on recovery interventions, and I am also involved in the work of many recovery organizations and I know large number of people in recovery process. I can tell you that it is not an easy task.

In this short time, I will try to address recovery problem on two levels, first, grass roots level and lived experience of drug users, and the one that decision makers and services should keep in mind when considering what measures are effective to reduce illicit drug use.

According to the UNGASS outcome document from 2016, drug dependence should be recognized as a complex, multi-factorial health disorder characterized by a chronic and relapsing nature with social causes and consequences.

There is no need to repeat all negative consequences that drug use brings, from health problems of individuals to the problems that this disorder inflicts on families and communities.

But why recovery? Shouldn't we rather work on reducing harms associated with drug use and dependence?

I think that we need to direct our efforts and emphasize the importance of focusing on recovery instead of simply seeking to reduce harm.

First thing we need to consider is to try to give back to people in recovery many aspects of their lives. I had spent 14 years of my life in heroin addiction. I know what addiction has taken from me, but I also experienced what recovery brought me back. I am recovered since 2002, 15 years of abstinence and I can say that addiction is more than a past to me.

Now we are challenged to help people with drug addiction to restore their self confidence, give them the opportunity to re-gain trust from their loved ones and the community in which they live, to put them in the same place where we are, not to criminalize them and not to marginalize them.

Recovery is not a statement, and there is no magic wand, the term recovery implies a process through which an individual is enabled to move from their problem of drug use toward a life without drugs, as an active and contributing member of society.

Let's think, on one hand, we have an addict who harms himself and others, and then he enters into a recovery process. Process is multidisciplinary and each service provider is in charge of one important segment. Individual is motivated to make progress in his recovery process. Along the way one institution provides stabilization services, others are involved in building human values, work on education and employment, and re-build psychosocial aspects of the personality. We have to offer something to people who are addicted as an alternative; we can't leave them without support. In the end, this systematic

approach can only bring benefits to society because recovered users are respectable, equal members of society, contributing, employed, pay taxes. We can only imagine the self-confidence that this person has now, and the joy and happiness of his family. I think many of you in this conference can share this view.

When you ask recovered users about their recovery journey, you will realize that in many cases they don't only speak about recovery from addiction, and removal of addiction as a major victory in their lives. Rather, they will tell you about all the needs they had as a human being, and due to addiction have never had the possibility to fulfill, but now they do. This is very important to remember. We need to shift focus from the pathology of addiction to the needs of each human being!

Strategically, there is a need to create a recovery oriented system of care that focuses on getting people into full recovery and off drugs for good. Inside of those systems, services need to provide hope based interventions. Hope based interventions rely on living proof what is possible, encouraging change, expressing confidence and providing concrete steps during different phases of recovery. Pain based interventions rely on threats of what we will do to you, but hope based interventions are based on promise of what we will do with you. It is possible only through this permanent change that individuals will cease offending, stop harming themselves and their communities and successfully contribute to society.

I would like to highlight 3 main recovery messages.

First is that addiction recovery is a reality. Drug addiction is recoverable condition. People do recover every day. There are people in natural recovery who never asked for help and today live without drugs. There are also people who failed many times but they are still in recovery process, not giving up to achieve better life.

Second is, that is also very important to mention that recovery will only flourish in supportive communities, and that is actually one of our main tasks. The ecology of recovery in communities has to become an ambience where drug addicts will not be marginalized and where services they need will be provided to them to address their overall problems, not only addiction. For that, we need to know on what to focus. Our focus should not be on problems that drug addiction inflicts on the community, but rather on the problems recovery removes from community, and on many things that recovery positively contributes in the community.

Third thing that is very important is that recovering and recovered people are not only a problem, but rather a part of the solution. In some countries, recovered users are not only integrated in society, but also work in institutions as recovery coaches, showing these positive example that is possible to live drug free lives. Through these engagements they have an enormous impact on overall drug problem.

I would like to conclude that we all have to have goals; we have to set those goals in reality, but also with ambition. Our main task is to put recovery as a primary goal in drug treatment, because all of us want to see our communities healthier, and reduce the use of illicit drugs. Along with the view that in society we had always drugs problems, and probably always will, we are aware that some addicts will never start or complete recovery process. But if we all focus on strengths and assets of a person, and not their weaknesses and deficits, and if we aim to further develop person-centered approach, when we aim to ensure that a person will be supported to achieve his maximum potential, then we, as service providers, decision makers and society can achieve results that will lead to integration of recovered users and their full inclusion into society what will bring less demand of use of illicit drugs.