

**Cllr. Jim Corr, addressing the 18th Mayors' Conference of ECAD in Varna, Bulgaria on 12th May 2011**

It is my honour and privilege, as Chairman of ECAD, to welcome delegates and friends to the 18th Mayors' Conference.

Ever since the establishment of ECAD in Stockholm over 18 years ago, cities throughout Europe have been willing to organise this annual get-together and think-in and we are deeply grateful to the city of Varna for taking on responsibility for the 2011 Conference and providing us with a range of speakers who are specialists in their disciplines.

**The Delegates**

The vast majority of the delegates here this morning are mayors, deputy mayors, councillors and professional officials who are deeply involved in the daily life of their cities, towns and municipalities.

In these days of economic recession, we all have to strive to live within limited budgets and to provide a diversity of services which respond to the economic, social and cultural needs of our citizens.

**Peripheral Expenditure**

There is an ever-present danger that the provision of physical infrastructure may take precedence over serious social needs which affect the living environment of some of our people. Indeed, in times of recession, expenditure on the protection of people from the injurious effects of illicit drugs and responding to the real needs of our unfortunate citizens who become addicted to illicit drugs, may be seen as peripheral expenditure which could be put on the back burner. Such a policy may have serious long-term social repercussions for our cities.

**Remit of ECAD**

ECAD is an international organisation committed to the welfare of people. It is a caring, person-centred movement which strives to protect people – young and not so young – from the serious physical and mental consequences arising from experimentation with illicit drugs, encouraging its member cities to share with other cities their approaches to the drug problem and by lobbying city and national governments to have in place medical facilities for the unfortunate people who succumb to the attraction of illicit drugs, become addicts and must be assisted to return to normal living, in keeping with their personal dignity and worth as human beings.

## **ECAD Conviction**

ECAD is as steadfast today in its convictions as it was eighteen years ago when men and women with vision and courage founded this organisation to fight the legalisers; namely those individuals and cash-rich organisations who are determined to have the sale and use of illicit drugs decriminalised.

Some politicians and political parties believe that their popularity will be enhanced by appealing to the lowest common denominator in society and succumb to the demands of every sector of the electorate.

But, all of us with democratic mandate, must be responsible and endeavour to lead in the direction which we believe will enhance the lifestyle and living conditions of our constituents.

Edmund Burke who was, by a very great distance, the most influential political thinker ever to come from Ireland, on one occasion told a large political gathering:

”Your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgment; and he betrays, instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion.”

Each one of us involved in the political process should ponder on the words of Edmund Burke.

## **The Residue of Legalisation**

All one has to do today is to visit a city where the selling and purchase of lethal illicit drugs is not a criminal offence and see the physical and mental conditions of drug addicts on the streets and in suburban parks. They are unfortunate people who are being destroyed, on a daily basis, because nobody is willing to lead them and care for them. Pale-faced, disconnected men and women, young and old, bereft of friends, incapable of managing their lives, living a life of aimless wandering, as they await their next fix, stark and harrowing examples of man’s inhumanity to man.

## **Spreading the News on Research**

The ECAD office in Stockholm cannot run the antidrug programmes in its member cities but it does disseminate the latest research findings on illicit drugs and there is an ever-increasing volume of such drugs from laboratories all over Europe getting onto the streets of our cities.

We are, of course, endeavouring to combat a most lucrative business. It exists because there are people determined to sell their life-destroying products and there are people willing to purchase them.

It is our job to strive to reduce the numbers of people willing to buy such drugs by educating the public on the dangers inherent in drug experimentation for the individual person, their families and often for entire communities.

In my country, we have seen entire communities marching in protest against drug pushers in their midst and co-operating with the police by identifying the culprits and the locations where they were selling drugs in parks, on city streets and even outside schools.

### **The Role of Schools**

I believe that the time has come for ECAD cities to engage in an in-depth review of the efforts being made in our schools to educate young people on the dangers inherent in illicit drugs.

I realise that all schools at this moment in time have a drug policy statement, but is it a well bound volume reposing in the Principal's office only, or is it part of the syllabus of the school?

### **Youth in Europe**

I want to take this opportunity to thank our colleagues in Reykjavik for establishing and driving the "Youth in Europe" programme, which is a drug prevention programme now on its sixth year.

It is a strategy designed to change the lives of young people in Europe for the better by reducing the numbers of young people involved in substance abuse and supporting networks that are conducive to promoting healthy life-styles for young people.

At this stage of the programme, we, on the Advisory Board of ECAD, are convinced that "Youth in Europe" will be a seminal study on the theme of drugs and youth.

### **Research**

Our Director, Jörgen Svidén, works extremely hard in gaining access to the latest research work on the drug problem and in translating such findings into best practice templates for our member cities.

### **Irish Research**

Allied to the work being progressed by the "Youth in Europe" programme, is a major study which was published in recent months by the Irish Government on the "Risk and Protection Factors for Substance use among young people".

It is the largest study ever undertaken on substance use among young people in Ireland. It differs from other studies in two important ways:

Firstly, whereas previous studies on substance use in this section of the population, focused almost exclusively on young people attending school, this study aims specifically to explore factors associated with those who left school early.

Secondly, the study aims to identify the risk and protective factors that influence young people's decisions regarding substance use.

It draws the conclusion that both the family (young person's parents above all) and the educational institutions can have a major impact on this decision.

The study indicates that the involvement of parents with their children is a major protective factor, reducing the risk of substance use, as is having positive experience of school and learning.

### **Complex issues**

It is only through research and the findings of studies that we can achieve a greater understanding of the complex issues involved in the overall problem and that such knowledge will assist us in developing appropriate interventions in our cities, schools and neighbourhoods across Europe.

### **Gratitude**

I fully appreciate, from my contacts with people running anti-drug programmes in my own city, that progress is often slow and much care and commitment above and beyond the call of duty is demanded.

The people working at the coalface in the fight against illicit drugs across Europe, pursue a vocation which demands much patience, knowledge and skill and we owe them an incalculable debt of gratitude.

### **Nothing is Immutable**

As we gather on the shores of the historic Black Sea, it is appropriate to recall the major political and economic changes in our European homeland over the past fifty years.

Such major changes demonstrate that where a vision is nurtured and leadership is in place, nothing is immutable in the lives of people.

Let us recall the prophetic and encouraging words of George Bernard Shaw:-

”Some men see things that are and say ‘why’ but I see things that never were and say ‘why not’.”

It is in that spirit of initiative and enterprise that we must renew our commitment to the mission of ECAD and continually implore nation states to respect the spirit and wording of the U.N. Conventions on Narcotic Drugs and Human Rights.

Our daily commitment in ECAD is to the welfare of our European people and to do everything possible to protect them from the injurious consequences of illicit drug experimentation and we are equally totally committed to ensure that those people who do succumb to addiction are given the very best medical services to return them to their families and friends as people restored to a new and meaningful life.