

Doctors of the World strongly condemns the re-introduction of a discriminatory public health decree in Greece

Tuesday, 9 July 2013

Last week, the new Greek Minister of Health decided to re-introduce Public Health Decree 39A which imposes measures such as obligatory testing for hepatitis, HIV and other sexually transmitted infections and communicable diseases. The decree stigmatizes drug users, sex workers and undocumented migrants in particular. The text also states that any occupants of housing which “may cause danger to public health” should be evicted from their homes, without any alternative being offered.

This decree is a serious violation of basic human rights, human dignity and medical ethics. It goes against the recommendations of international public health specialists and human rights bodies, including those from the WHO, UNAIDS, the European Centre for Disease Control and the EU Fundamental Rights Agency. Repressive legal action, confinement and compulsory testing have proven not to protect public health. Rather, these stigmatizing attitudes limit the opportunities for genuine medical care and encourage transmission of diseases.

Instead of tackling the underlying reasons for illness, poverty and addiction, the Greek Health Minister is clearly violating basic human rights and human dignity under the guise of “protecting the community from contagious diseases”. Doctors of the World asks the Greek government to focus on the bigger public health problems, such as children’s universal right to immunisation and the need for this right to be implemented, something the government is no longer able to guarantee.

We also call on all health professionals to refuse to conduct mandatory testing. Through our polyclinics and mobile units across Greece, Doctors of the World will continue to offer help, medical coverage and social support to all people in need of healthcare, in keeping with our medical ethics and patient confidentiality. We will continue to fight on the same side as the most vulnerable populations and to defend human rights whenever they are breached.

Once again, we are present alongside the people.

On behalf of the International Network of Doctors of the World

Dr. Liana Maili – President of Doctors of the World Greece

Dr. Alvaro González – President of Médicos del Mundo Spain

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