

FRONT AIDS

Press Release

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Front AIDS action called to attract attention to catastrophic situation of HIV positive people in the Russian Federation

21 October at 14:30, Independent Press Center (Tverskoi bulvar, 20, 2nd floor), Moscow -- AIDS activists demand that the Russian government take strong, visible, and measurable action to ensure treatment for people living with HIV/AIDS in Russia.

On 12 October 2004 in Kaliningrad, activists from the organization Front AIDS demonstrated in order to attract attention to the catastrophic situation of HIV positive people in the Russian Federation. More than 10 activists chained themselves to the City Administration building. As the result of this action all the activists were arrested and the action gained wide support from many international and Russian AIDS organizations.

“We, the members of the Russian movement Front AIDS, had to take this strong action, because we cannot remain silent witnesses to the tragedy of people who are practically sentenced to death due to the absence of antiretroviral treatment,” said Alexander Rummyantsev of the St. Petersburg NGO “Delo.”

The Russian Federal AIDS Center estimates that today over 1 million people in Russia live with HIV/AIDS. Fifty-six thousand of them are in urgent need of treatment, but only 1300 (2,3%) of those get it. Drug users, who constitute 80% of all HIV positive people, are often denied access to treatment and are written off as unreachable or noncompliant. Yet international experience demonstrates that treatment is as effective for drug users as for any other patients if it is organized to meet their specific needs.

“We can avoid AIDS deaths altogether,” said Dmitry Samoilov, of the Moscow-based Community of People Living With HIV. “There are medicines that can prolong and improve the quality of life of an infected person. But in our country they are inaccessible.”

People are already dying, and the low official death count is only due to the fact that the epidemic in Russia is relatively young. In several years the number of deaths will be counted in the hundreds of thousands. Front AIDS demands the government and public to act urgently to improve the situation.

Press conference speakers:

Alexander Rummyantsev, NGO “Delo,” Saint Petersburg

Dmitry Samoilov, “Community of People Living With HIV/AIDS, Moscow

Andrey Rylkov, drug users’ organization “Kolodets,” Moscow

Evgeniy Schetov, environmental organization “Rainbow Custodians,” Moscow