



MEDIA RELEASE

Embargoed until 08:00 AEST Tuesday, 14 February 2023

Helen Clark, former New Zealand PM and current Chair of the Global Commission on Drug Policy, to open the 27th Harm Reduction International Conference (HR23) in Melbourne, Australia

Tuesday, 14 February 2023 (Melbourne, Australia)— Former New Zealand Prime Minister and current Chair of the [Global Commission on Drug Policy](#), **Helen Clark**, will open the 27th [Harm Reduction International Conference \(HR23\)](#) being held at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre, Australia on April 16-19. The biennial conference, convened by [Harm Reduction International \(HRI\)](#) is expected to attract over a thousand researchers, policy makers, health workers, civil society organisations and activists. The conference was last held in Australia in 2004.

As a member of the Global Commission on Drug Policy, Clark is joined by 15 former Presidents and Prime Ministers including former Colombian **President Juan Manuel Santos** and former Mexican **President Ernesto Zedillo**, together with a group of high profile figures including Virgin founder **Sir Richard Branson**, **Louise Arbour**, the former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and **Adeeba Kamarulzaman**, infectious disease specialist and the immediate Past President of the International AIDS Society. The Commission advocates for drug policies based on scientific evidence, human rights, public health and security. Clark will be accompanied in Melbourne at the conference by **Geoffrey Gallop**, a fellow Commissioner and former Premier of Western Australia.

“The war on drugs is a failure and what better person than the hugely respected Helen Clark to share with us her vision of drug policies that are based on evidence and the principles of public health as opposed to discrimination, criminalisation and repression,” said **Naomi Burke-Shyne**, Executive Director of HRI.

HR23 is taking place at a time of reform and progress in drug policy in a number of Australian states and the Southeast Asia region. Australia was an early and strong adopter of harm reduction and stands as an example of good harm reduction practice, with an extensive network of needle and syringe programmes, access to pharmacotherapy options and naloxone, robust viral hepatitis testing and treatment, as well as two medically supervised injecting centres (also known as drug consumption rooms or overdose prevention centres). Despite this long history of harm reduction-focused policy and practice, reform in some spheres – for example pill testing, heroin prescription programmes, decriminalisation of personal use and possession of drugs, and prison-based needle and syringe programmes – is still a challenge in Australia.

“We’re thrilled that the conference is returning to Australia for the first time in nearly two decades. It will be a special opportunity to showcase the leadership of the community of people who use drugs, Melbourne’s innovative harm reduction programmes, and also to push for further progress not just for the country, but for the region as a whole,” said Burke-Shyne.

Reinforcing the conference theme of *Strength in Solidarity*, HRI will partner on the event with four Australian civil society and professional health organisations: Harm Reduction Victoria, the Australian Injecting and Illicit Drug Users League (AIVL), The Australasian Society of the Study of HIV, Viral Hepatitis and Sexual Health Medicine (ASHM) and the International Network on Health and Hepatitis in Substance Users (INHSU).

Media Registration: Accredited Media can register [here](#).

Further Information:

Michael Kessler, HR23 Media Relations

Mob: + 34 655 792 699

Email: media@hri.global

Twitter: @mickessler

About HRI

[Harm Reduction International \(HRI\)](#) is an international NGO which works to use data and advocacy to promote harm reduction and drug policy reform and demonstrate how rights-based, evidence-informed responses to drugs contribute to healthier, safer societies. It has convened the Harm Reduction International Conference since 1990.