



EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
OFFICE OF NATIONAL DRUG CONTROL POLICY
Washington, D.C. 20503

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Dear Dr. Amon and Ms. Schleifer:

Thank you very much for your letter of September 23, 2011 on the Drug Detention Centers in Vietnam. We are greatly concerned by reports that there may be over 100 facilities in Vietnam operating under the pretense of providing drug treatment that may instead be subjecting thousands of addicted individuals to inhumane labor conditions. The U.S. government, including our embassy in Vietnam, is following this situation closely.

We were also concerned to hear that the research-based guidelines enumerated in NIDA's Principles of Effective Drug Addiction Treatment were being misinterpreted to justify practices that do not appear to be primarily focused on providing addicted individuals with the best available treatments. Far from providing a justification for violent or punitive coercion, the principle stating that "Treatment does not have to be voluntary to be effective" is based on evidence that treatment entered as a result of a criminal justice mandate to avoid imprisonment, or even within a criminal justice setting, can be successful. This principle also applies to other addicted individuals who would not have entered treatment were it not for a doctor, nurse, relative or friend who took the time to present to them the serious health consequences of avoiding needed drug treatment. Importantly, regardless of the manner in which an intervention is initiated (voluntary or involuntary), addiction treatment must be: a) evidence-based; b) take advantage of the various treatment modalities available (i.e., behavioral and/or pharmacological); and c) address the multiple needs of the individual.

Addiction involves disturbances in the brain circuits in charge of introspection, cognitive control and decision making. These are the same circuits whose proper function would allow a person to recognize that he or she has a disorder that requires professional help. Thus, these deficits in brain function can often prompt, and indeed legally justify a loved one, a doctor, or a judge to take charge and require that the individual receive drug treatment. However, such treatment must be provided under strict professional standards.

The practices alleged to have taken place in Vietnam's drug detention centers are inconsistent with NIDA's principles of drug treatment. Furthermore, agents who would routinely and without due process force drug users to undergo "treatment" and "rehabilitation" in

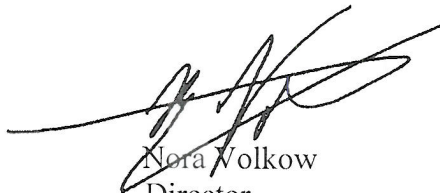
the conditions described in your report not only would violate NIDA's principles of drug treatment, but also would infringe upon internationally recognized human rights.

Thank you once again for sharing your findings with us. We appreciate Human Rights Watch's concern with ensuring that the best available treatments for drug-addicted individuals are made known to the Government of Vietnam and other governments worldwide.

Sincerely,



R. Gil Kerlikowske
Director
Office of National Drug Control Policy Drug



Nora Volkow
Director
National Institute of Drug Abuse