

Network faults govt's war on drugs strategy

By Sylvester Domasa

GOVERNMENT'S approach to curb drug trafficking by seeking to trace sources through interrogations of drug users is not a plausible tactic, the Tanzania Network of People who Use Drugs (TaNPUD) has said.

The statement comes as a direct response to the Anti-

Drugs Unit (ADU), Senior Assistant Commissioner of Police (SACP) Godfrey Nzowa, call for the public to remit information on not only traffickers but users as well.

The statement was issued in a press release jointly signed by TaNPUD Secretary Kitwala Nginilla, MUKIKUTE (HIV/TB programme) Chairman Joseph Mapunda and Programme Coordinator of the

humanitarian organisation, Médecins du Monde (MdM) Ancella Voets.

Expressing their concerns, they warned that arresting drug users as part of the war on drugs will only serve to isolate them further from society which in turn increases their propensity to use drugs and with increased demand it follows that supply will also increase, defeating the very purpose of their

arrest. "Trying to find drug traffickers through drug users is not only useless...even if they do speak out, they are likely to point to small dealers only which are also often just other users trying to finance their own drug use and not to the big traffickers behind the scene who really matter," reads the statement in part.

"It will further increase the risk of HIV, hepatitis and tuberculosis spreading to

other members of the society, undermining the potential achievement of the Three Zeros (zero new HIV infections, zero AIDS-related deaths and zero discrimination)," it reads.

The statement said, People Who Use Drugs (PWUD) tend to suffer from viral hepatitis and tuberculosis more often than others.

"These diseases are not caused by drugs, but rather by

the use of contaminated syringes, bad living conditions, limited access to healthcare and discrimination," it explains arguing that locking up drug abusers puts them in these risk conditions.

Expressing optimism over government plans to amend the Drugs Act of 1995 to allow scaling up of harm reduction and other drug treatments, the statement goes

on to allege that drugs enter the country because powerful traffickers easily circumvent security checks at borders (ports and airports) as is the case in most other countries.

No response has been availed by the authorities over the allegations and denouncement of the ongoing police tactic to use drug abusers as stepping stones to unmasking traffickers and ring leaders.