

# **The international drug Policy Debate**



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# The international Drug Policy Debate

- A number of very vocal actors advocating for "drug policy reform"
- Framing the issue as a choice between "a failed war on drugs" and "a regulated market based on public health and human rights"
- A global debate



# Typical Talking Points

- **”The war on drugs has failed”**
- **”The war on drugs causes more harm than it prevents”**
- **”A health issue, not a criminal justice issue”**
- **Drug use as an issue of personal freedom**
- **”Tobacco and alcohol are worse”**
- **A regulated market – ”responsible, like alcohol”**
- **Regulate (i.e. legalize) drugs to**
  - protect young people
  - to take the profit out of the hands of criminal organisations
  - to secure tax revenues



# What's New?

- **Strong financial backers**
- **Coordinated lobby working with political leaders, nations and international bodies**
- **Changing facts on the ground**
  - Medical marijuana in 21 states in the US
  - Legalisation of recreational marijuana in two US states
  - Legalisation of marijuana in

→  
UI



# Drug policy Reform?

## UnGASS 2016

- **UNGASS - General Assembly Special Session: the leading policy making organ of the UN**
- **UNGASS 2016 a follow up of:**
  - Political Declaration on Global Drug Control (1998)

”To eliminat[e] or significantly reduc[e] the illicit manufacture, marketing and trafficking of psychotropic substances...”
  - Political Declaration and Plan of Action (2008)

”To minimize and eventually eliminate the availability and use of illicit drugs and psychotropic substances...”
- **Next UNGASS on drugs originally scheduled for 2019**
- **Latin American countries (Mexico, Columbia, Guatemala) called for “an international conference on drug policy reform” → UNGASS 2016**



# So, what's new?

- Many (wish to) see this process as an opening for "drug policy reform" i.e. drug legalization
- The concept "Drug policy reform" is intentionally vague" – interpreted differently, anything from minor reforms to radical change
- The call for an UNGASS comes from Latin America, which has suffered from the effects of organized crime and the illegal drug trade, and where leaders have spoken out for new approaches
- Some key words: drug policies based on "public health", "respect for human rights" and "harm reduction".
- Increasingly coordinated efforts from "drug reform groups"
- Changing facts on the ground, particularly the U.S.



# Background for Drug POLicy Futures

- **The drug NGO community dominated by legalization groups**
- **A need for more coordination of like-minded groups**
- **Create a united voice for the drug restrictive side and coordinate actions**
- **Necessary to establish a common platform to define what we agree on**
- **Mission: show the broad public support for the UN conventions and highlight good practices within the framework of the conventions**



# What is Drug Policy Futures?

- **A global platform for a drug policy debate based on health**
- **Engage in an open dialogue about the strengths and weaknesses of global drug policies.**
- **Advocate for evidence based strategies to promote public health, safety and and the well-being of society, including those addicted to drugs and their families.**





# Alternatives, yes! Legalization, No!

- **We reject the false choice between a "war on drugs " on the one hand and "legalization" on the other**
- There are many ways in which countries can explore innovative drug policies within the current drug control regime. Innovation is not synonymous with legalisation.
- Drug Policy Futures calls for a balance between demand and supply reduction, as well as risk reduction measures as defined in the UNODC/UNAIDS/WHO technical guide
- We don't have to choose between a mass-incarceration policy on the one side and legalization on the other.



# **Concerns over Legalization**

## **1) Commercialization of Drugs**

# **ConCerns over Legalization**

## **2) Product Development**

# Concerns over Legalization

## 3) Political Influence

- **A new "industrial epidemic" – a health threat caused by the commercialisation of harmful products**
- **Emergence of Big Marijuana – like Big Tobacco and Big Alcohol**
- **An industry that – like any other industry – will**
  - Ensure that their products are popular and available
  - Influence public policy to ensure access to markets (cf. alcohol industry)

# Ten Point Declaration

- 1) **Drug use is a risk factor for a range of negative outcomes**
- 2) **A public health oriented drug policy should prevent drug-related harm from occurring**
- 3) **Drug use is particularly harmful to young people**
- 4) **Drug use does not only affect the user**
- 5) **There is a need for a comprehensive approach to drug related harm**
- 6) **The vast majority of the world population do not use drugs**



# Ten Point Declaration

7) We believe that recovery is the best way for people who have developed drug related problems to minimize their risk of further consequences

8) Law enforcement plays an integral role in drug use prevention

9) *Tackling the world drug problem requires strong international collaboration.*

10) *To promote public health and public safety it is essential that governments adhere to the three main drug control treaties of 1961, 1971, and 1988, as well as the Convention of the Rights of the Child. We believe that the UN drug treaties*



# Principles of drug policy

- Drug policies should prevent initiation of drug use.
- Drug policies must respect human rights (for users and non-users alike) as well as the principle of proportionality.
- Drug policies should strike a balance of efforts to reduce the use of drugs and the supply of drugs.
- Drug policies should protect children from drug use.
- Drug policies should ensure access to medical help.



Our partners.  
So far...



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