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Commission on Narcotic Drugs

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**Follow-up to the implementation at the national,
regional and international levels of all
commitments, as reflected in the Ministerial
Declaration of 2019, to address and counter the
world drug problem**

Statement submitted by Instituto RIA AC, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council**

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* [E/CN.7/2024/1](#).

** Issued without formal editing.



The world is changing. People who use drugs are politicizing, recognizing that they don't want to be part of prohibitionist regimes. Online drug markets use terms such as "blood-free" cocaine to increase their reach and while this might be a marketing scheme, it represents a consciousness shift that should be named. The majority of people who use drugs, according to the annual World Drug Reports, do so without causing problems in their personal and professional lives. The majority of people would choose to buy psychoactive substances that do not perpetuate violence or provide greater revenue to violent non-state actors or that foment corruption. However, without legal regulatory schemes, which take into account social justice principles, that is not possible.

The Commission on Narcotic Drugs will meet again to evaluate the past and propose a path forward. In previous sessions, little has been done to truly measure the harms of primarily prohibition-based policies. We continue to fear substances, instead of learning to treat them with respect.

Prohibition has failed in achieving its intended goals. Instead of reducing drug use, drug cultivation and production and associated harms, it has fuelled a lucrative illegal market that perpetuates other crimes. The so-called war on drugs has been a war on people and has resulted in countless lives lost, families torn apart, and communities ravaged by violence. Mexico and Colombia, in particular, have borne the brunt of these failed policies, although there have been glimmers of change over the past decade.

In countries of the Global North, the current prohibitionist approach has also contributed to an overdose crisis, because of an adulterated and unregulated drug supply. Without access to safe consumption spaces and overdose prevention measures, people who use drugs are left vulnerable to potentially fatal consequences. Each overdose death is a tragic reminder of the urgent need for a new approach to drug policy. And every day, more people and communities are hit by these losses. We need to say it again and again, Support, Don't Punish.

In Colombia, Mexico and Latin America, efforts to build democracy, combat corruption, uphold the rule of law and construct lasting peace are undermined by prohibition-based policies. For decades, countries have grappled with the consequences of drug prohibition, fuelling violence, corruption, and instability. However, amidst this crisis, there lies an opportunity for a radical paradigm shift – a shift towards legal regulation that not only addresses the harms associated with drug use but also strengthens democratic institutions, reduces corruption, and fosters greater rule of law.

Legal regulation offers a viable alternative to the failed policy of prohibition. By shifting from a punitive approach to a regulatory one, governments can effectively address the harms associated with cocaine production and trafficking while strengthening democratic institutions, reducing corruption, and fostering rule of law.

Over the past 50 years, studies regarding coca and cocaine products have been repressed or manipulated within countries and in the international drug control system. While definitive statements regarding how the cocaine market might be affected by legal regulation would be hasty, emerging evidence from regulated cannabis markets suggests that legal regulation with a social justice focus can reduce risks¹, improve health² and possibly provide economic opportunities in regions or

¹ In addition to regulation improving the quality of products and the mode of ingestion (for example vaporizing), and possibly reducing the potency of what is currently available on the illegal market, there are preliminary studies that demonstrate that the substitution of some substances for others can reduce risks. See e.g. Reiman, A. (2009). Cannabis as a substitute for alcohol and other drugs. *Harm Reduction Journal*, 6, 35. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1477-7517-6-35>.

² Marijuana use among young people in the United States has generally remained stable, both on a national level and in states with regulated cannabis markets with a linear decrease over the past decade. Studies show that 15.8% of high school students reported using marijuana at least once in the past 30 days in 2021 – compared with 21.7% in 2009 and a significant decrease from the high of 23.4% in 2013, according to the Youth Risk Behavior Study 2011-2021 from the Centers

communities^{3,4} that have been highly impacted by prohibition. Regulation seeks to strengthen government institutions, by setting clear rules and providing safe, legal access to licensed coca and cocaine products for adults. Rather than allowing criminal groups to undermine institutions and government officials, legal regulation provides the opportunity to assume control of the cocaine market and thus engage diverse stakeholders in a process that puts information, health, harm reduction and development at the centre.

At its core, drug policy should prioritize guaranteeing human rights. Legal regulation respects the autonomy and dignity of individuals, ensuring that they are not subject to arbitrary arrest, detention, or violence simply for using drugs. Transitioning from an illegal market to a legal one can begin to provide development opportunities to communities that traditionally cultivate these plants, including coca leaf, cannabis and poppy.

The need for a regional paradigm shift is urgent, particularly in Colombia and other Latin American countries deeply affected. By joining together to advocate for a new approach, policymakers can pave the way for a safer, healthier, and more just society for all. We propose the legal regulation of these markets – specifically the cocaine market – because we acknowledge that people will continue to consume illegal drugs.

We see transformations occurring under cannabis regulation schemes being implemented in the Americas. Regulating the cannabis market through a social justice framework appears to have a positive impact in the reduction of arrests, detentions, and incarceration, as well as having broad reaching effects on state capacity due to increasingly high tax revenues.⁵ This promotes drug policies that follow the goals of

for Disease Control and Prevention in the United States. Accessed on October 12, 2023.

www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/data/yrbs/pdf/YRBS_Data-Summary-Trends_Report2023_508.pdf.

An additional federal study, published in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine looked at three longitudinal studies on consumption in young people in Oregon, New York and Washington State and found that state-level marijuana legalization is not associated with increased youth cannabis use. Accessed October 12, 2023,

www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0749379722004913.

³ Equity Programs are currently being discussed or implemented in various states in the United States to repair the harms caused by prohibition, particularly in communities of colour. See New York State Office of Cannabis Management, “New York Social and Economic Equity Plan” 2023. <https://cannabis.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2023/09/nys-see-plan-english.pdf>, Mass. Gen. Laws Ann. ch. 94G, § 4(a)(4); Recommendations for Ensuring Racial equity in Marijuana Licensing”, Boston City Council Committee on Jobs, Wages, and Workforce Development, December 2016, www.boston.gov/sites/default/files/document-file-01-2017/marijuana-report.pdf (including recommendations for developing an equitable recreational marijuana licensing system in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts); “2017 Cannabis Dispensary Permits Request for Permit Applications”, City of Oakland: Special Activity Permits Division, Office of the City Administration, October 2017, <http://www2.oaklandnet.com/oakcal/groups/cityadministrator/documents/memorandum/oak067010.pdf>; “Cannabis Equity Report”, City and County of San Francisco, Office of Cannabis, Human Rights Commission & Controller’s Office, November 1, 2017, <https://sfgov.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=5533484&GUID=DBB17596-3BCB-44D9-A3DF-6ECA247E9A16>; “Social Equity Proposal to City Council”, Los Angeles Cannabis Task Force: Social Equity Committee, September 13, 2017, http://clkrep.lacity.org/onlinedocs/2017/17-0653_pc_9-13-17.pdf; “Ordinance Establishing an Equity Program for Cannabis Businesses”, City of Sacramento Law and Legislation Committee Report, November 14, 2017, http://sacramento.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?view_id=21&event_id=31105&meta_id=506973.

⁴ There are an estimated 428,059 full-time jobs that have been created in the legal cannabis industry in the United States as of January 2022. Bruce Barcott and Beau Whitney, “Jobs report 2022”, Leafly, 2022, <https://leafly-cms-production.imgix.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/22132544/LeaflyJobsReport2022.pdf>.

⁵ Equity Programs are currently being discussed or implemented in various states in the United States to repair the harms caused by prohibition, particularly in communities of colour. See Mass. Gen. Laws Ann. ch. 94G, § 4(a)(4); Recommendations for Ensuring Racial equity in Marijuana Licensing”, Boston City Council Committee on Jobs, Wages, and Workforce Development, December 2016, www.boston.gov/sites/default/files/document-file-01-2017/marijuana-report.pdf (including recommendations for developing an equitable recreational marijuana licensing system in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts); “2017 Cannabis Dispensary

improving public health, contributing to human development and security, and strengthening rule of law. Evidence, not political posturing, should guide our policymaking.

The harms of prohibition are undeniable, and the time for change is long overdue. Legal regulation offers a path forward that prioritizes human rights, health, and social justice. By embracing this paradigm shift, we can build a future where individuals are treated with dignity, compassion, and respect. Change may be challenging, but the rewards – in lives saved, communities strengthened, and democracy restored – are immeasurable. The time for change is now – our present and future depends on it.

Permits Request for Permit Applications”, City of Oakland: Special Activity Permits Division, Office of the City Administration, October 2017, <http://www2.oaklandnet.com/oakca1/groups/cityadministrator/documents/memorandum/oak067010.pdf>; “Cannabis Equity Report”, City and County of San Francisco, Office of Cannabis, Human Rights Commission & Controller’s Office, November 1, 2017, <https://sfgov.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=5533484&GUID=DBB17596-3BCB-44D9-A3DF-6ECA247E9A16>; “Social Equity Proposal to City Council”, Los Angeles Cannabis Task Force: Social Equity Committee, September 13, 2017, http://clkrep.lacity.org/onlinedocs/2017/17-0653_pc_9-13-17.pdf; “Ordinance Establishing an Equity Program for Cannabis Businesses”, City of Sacramento Law and Legislation Committee Report, November 14, 2017, http://sacramento.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?view_id=21&event_id=3105&meta_id=506973.