

ENCOD Statement, to UN CND December 2014

When historians look back on the 21st Century drug policy evolution, what will confound them most is this question: "What took the international community so long to abolish the three international conventions on narcotic drugs? To repair a historical error that was committed with the criminalization of natural substances that people have used for centuries and the imposition of an international consensus on the efforts to police a problem that is essentially social.

The answer is simple and glaring. Only one thing caused the damaging delay: heads buried in sand. This delay, of which we are in the tail end, has disastrous ramifications on public safety around the world every day. Illegal drug violence kills a quarter of a million people annually: this is magnitudes worse than the damage caused by even the most dangerous of drugs themselves. This is thanks to laws so ineffective and counterproductive that communities around the world are choosing to unilaterally change them.

As of this moment, Uruguay and four U.S. states have voted to legalize cannabis. By the time UNGASS convenes in 2016, that number will have grown significantly: in the U.S. alone, polls show citizens in half a dozen more states will vote to regulate cannabis. In the states and nations that have legalized cannabis and/or decriminalized all drugs, crime, violence and youth use rates have all decreased, while tax revenue has been snatched from criminals.

Because of this, the impetus to reexamine drug policy is growing annually. This, in fact, is why UNGASS 2016 is being convened at the request of three Latin American presidents.

Encod represents the European section of an International Coalition of NGO's (ICN) consisting of almost 400 organizations (see <http://www.encod.org/info/COALITION-FOR-JUST-AND-EFFECTIVE.html>) that was established in 1998, on the eve of a previous UN General Assembly Special Session, that was convened under the slogan: 'A drug free world, we can do it!'

We are a worldwide coalition of citizens affected and concerned by drug policies, as consumers, producers, health workers, researchers and activists. We are the people caught in the crossfire of the war on drugs. First hand witnesses of the social and health disasters that are generated by the failed efforts to eradicate drugs from the world.

We believe that the UN Conventions on Narcotic Drugs are a straitjacket for national drug policies which serves basically to protect financial interests. First of all of the pharmaceutical companies that encourage the criminalization of natural plants (such as cannabis, coca leaves and opium) that have been used for their numerous medicinal properties during many centuries by people all over the world. Of course the pharmaceutical industry has a vested interest in keeping these plants illegal, so

people will continue to demand their industrial substitutes, though they are more expensive, less effective and producing lots of negative side effects..

Besides prohibition has led to jeopardize the rule of law, facilitating corruption at every level and empowering all kind of organized crime, including the money laundering operations in the increasingly liberalized banking system.

Poorly conceived and counterproductive drug policies have been allowed to continue for so long precisely because in the decision-making process on these policies, a serious debate has been absent. The impact of drug prohibition on public safety, health, human rights and economy is never the object of thorough parliamentary scrutiny. Drug Strategies and Action Plans that are regularly presented by governments are copies of themselves, endless repetitions of the same conclusions, which never touch the essential questions: is this policy working and what are the alternatives?

According to UN Deputy Secretary General Jan Eliasson, the overarching objective of the UN is to ensure 'comprehensive, structured and meaningful participation of Civil Society in the lead up to and at the UNGASS 2016 on Drugs'.

Therefore we feel encouraged by the UN today, when presenting the following challenge to all governmental delegations that will attend the UNGASS in 2016.

Please take this UNGASS seriously. Not another photo opportunity. Please, we have heard enough empty slogans, we want to hear real words and above all, see real actions.

Take drugs seriously. In the year before UNGASS 2016, set up a series of parliamentary hearings about the social, health and economic impact of drug policies on your country. Invite to this debate the critical voices, the testimonies of the people who have been direct- or indirectly victimized as a result of drug related violence or harsh drug laws, the policemen, the judges, the doctors, the economists who have come to understand the utter wrongness of drug prohibition, as well as the voices of civil society organizations that propose alternative ways to regulate currently illegal substances. On the basis of the results of those hearings, your parliament will formulate a list of recommendations that your country will present in New York.

By meeting this challenge, you will not only please us, you will please your population and the generations to come. By getting the facts on the table and sorting out a better policy on drugs, you will take a crucial step towards a healthier, safer and greener world.

By not meeting this challenge, your country risks to be put on a list of shame, of countries that stubbornly denied to release the iron headlock of the UN Conventions, and thus denied their own citizens their basic right to health and safety.

If the proposal to abolish the UN Conventions will not obtain a majority, there may be ways that your country could be interested in proposing modifications to the UN Conventions on Drugs. One effective way to do this has been proposed by the NGO Law Enforcement Against Prohibition, a group comprised of thousands of former and current police officers, government agents and other law enforcement agents around the world who oppose the current War on Drugs.

We urge the governments to consider implementing at least these simple and sensible changes at UNGASS in 2016. Drug use, as we've seen in over half a century of failed prohibition, can only be mitigated by regulation, science, and a health approach recognizing the difference between use and abuse of products. Strained law enforcement resources need to combat real crime.

In a complicated world, the drug policy solution is unusually simple. Let's keep future historians from laughing at our intransigence any longer. We on the UNGASS drug policy team at ENCOD are happy to continue this discussion. The LEAP proposal is widely available as well.

Thank you,

ENCOD

(read by Janko Belin)