

**Panel discussion on The legalization of drugs:
Can it help curb organized crime?**

Monday 25 March

(Morning)

The meeting was called to order at 9.05 a.m., with Lord Dholakia (United Kingdom) in the Chair as Moderator.

A short documentary film "Breaking the taboo" concerning the war on drugs was screened.

The MODERATOR, introducing the panel discussion, said that the aim of the event was to address the questions posed in the concept paper drawn up for the session and to explore the role of parliamentarians as legislators and opinion leaders in driving forward the issue of drug legalization. With respect to the question of trafficking and organized crime, he would be making available for circulation to participants a briefing paper produced by the United Kingdom All-Party Parliamentary Group for Drug Policy Reform, of which he was a member. Organized crime thrived in conditions such as those associated with the illicit drugs trade: high profits, a huge guaranteed market, weak and corruptible institutions, poverty, and lack of opportunity. It was in fact more acutely involved in the drugs trade than in any other illicit business.

The cost of fighting the war on drugs was astronomical and yet neither drug consumption nor the prevalence of drug misuse had been curbed. Moreover, a well-developed evidence base on effective means of reducing the damage caused by the illegal drugs trade was still a long way off. The three key drug-related treaties had substantially driven the tendency for drug policies worldwide to focus on criminalization and prohibition rather than on a health-based approach, which was a new option to be explored. Attention should also be paid to the effectiveness of the anti-drug policies in place and to the relationship between the illicit drug trade and such matters as poverty, ignorance and the destabilization of States. Parliamentarians must lead the way at home by opening up the debate and offering alternative solutions for moving forward to create sound and stable societies.

He introduced the four panellists on the chosen topic and invited them to make their presentations in order to set the stage for the discussion.

Ms F.Z. NADIRI, Panellist, Member of the Parliament of Afghanistan, said that she welcomed the topic of discussion as a great opportunity to work collectively on solutions for tackling the drugs problem that so adversely affected her own country, among others. There was no black-or-white answer, however, as each country approached the subject from its own unique perspective. In Afghanistan, for example, it would be a complex matter to legalize drugs in the light of the prevailing institutional weakness, insecurity and absence of rule of law, which would simply pave the way for further abuse. At most, a pilot project could perhaps be implemented with caution in certain provinces with a view to expanding it elsewhere if it achieved positive results.

Ms M. OBRADOVIĆ, Panellist, Member of the Parliament of Serbia, illustrating her presentation with slides, said that as a parliamentarian and member of the public, and in particular as a mother wishing to protect her child, she was concerned by the easy availability of drugs, by the tactics employed by drug dealers to increase their trade and by the lengths to which young addicts would go to acquire drugs. In Serbia, the number of drug addicts was estimated to be over twice as high as the officially registered number and the consequences for families and society at large were manifest. Parliamentarians must ensure that sufficient funds were allocated to equipping law enforcement agencies with the means to fight the burgeoning problem and also pass laws to simplify legal procedures and speed up trials, as well as protect all those involved in bringing major criminals to justice.

Located as it was on the so-called "Balkan route", Serbia was a transit country for international criminal gangs smuggling heroin to Western Europe from Afghanistan and Iran. It was considered risky, however, on account of the many seizures and arrests made by its law enforcement agencies working in cooperation with their counterparts elsewhere. As a result, heroin routes had shifted and heroin seizures had fallen significantly from 1.4 tons in 2007 to only 55 kilograms in 2012. The National Assembly was also active in Serbia's fight against drugs; a parliamentary committee had organized a public hearing on the topic at which participants had emphasized the preventive approach and the importance of family, school and environment, peer education, and the social reintegration of former addicts. Having monitored the impact elsewhere, Serbian experts had concluded that drug legalization would make no positive contribution at the present stage to alleviating the country's drug situation. The immediate imperative was to strengthen the institutions, procedures and mechanisms for controlling it.

Mr. E. DE LA REGUERA, Panellist, Journalist, stated that, in addition to his work as the Latin American correspondent for a Swedish newspaper, he had written a book on cocaine after realizing from his experience of living in Mexico that it was impossible to comprehend Latin American politics and economics without taking into account the huge impact of drugs money and the war on drugs in the region. A panel discussion on the legalization of drugs would have been inconceivable only a few years earlier, which showed that the taboo was indeed being broken, as also evidenced by the public debates on the subject in such countries as Guatemala and Uruguay and the legalization of some drugs in sport. The different pros and cons of legalization must be weighed up separately for each drug, however.

Many thousands had been killed, tortured or abused in the drug war in Mexico, where criminal organizations often colluded with corrupt politicians, police and other authorities. It was therefore essential to move away from the strategy of combating organized crime with the help of those authorities, which had been a huge strategic failure. Efforts should instead be focused on combating the poverty, inequality and unemployment that drove many into working for criminal organizations. Essentially a paradigm shift in the approach to development was required.

Mr. J. CALZADA, Panellist, Secretary General of the National Drugs Bureau of Uruguay, presenting an overview of the Uruguayan approach to the fight against drugs, said that the idea was not to legalize or liberalize drugs per se but rather to introduce a State-controlled use of drugs, specifically marijuana, the premise being that the drug problem was not sufficiently clear-cut as to be resolved by either prohibition or legalization. Drugs policies had social and other impacts and it must also be remembered that democratic stability was closely linked to the vast amounts of drug money that circulated around the world daily in small denominations and eventually ended up on the legal market. The unhelpful legacy of the 20th century was that criminal sanctions were the way to eliminate drug use, which was not borne out by the evidence; drugs now had a larger market and a more harmful impact than ever before, with the most vulnerable regions suffering the worst effects of the war on drugs, as seen in certain parts of Latin America. It was a complex ill for which there was no simple cure.

Uruguay had made progress towards stronger democracy and poverty reduction, but violent drug-related crime in particular had paradoxically increased, prompting the adoption of a State-controlled use of marijuana as a policy. The complete lack of control over drug markets had serious implications for health, security and lives and a more productive way of moving forward would be to conclude regional agreements rooted in the realities of the current-day era. Legalization was a hot topic in Latin America and a study commissioned by the Organization of American States on alternative policy options was expected to take the debate further towards action. A amendment of the key drug-related treaties on which current policies were based would be a step in the right direction. It would be senseless to continue pursuing current policies in the hope of achieving results.

The MODERATOR thanked the panellists for their presentations and invited comments and questions from participants who might also wish to share information about good practices undertaken in their countries for addressing the issue under discussion.

Mr. B. NEMATI (Islamic Republic of Iran) observed that drug activities escalated crime and had grave implications for security, social stability and economic development, with his country paying a heavy price for its location on the drug-trafficking route to Europe. The 1,200 kg of trafficked drugs seized daily by Iranian police accounted for only one fifth of the total. One third of the remainder was consumed inside the country. The experiences of countries that had legalized drugs should be carefully studied in order to learn useful lessons, although any negative repercussions, such as increased consumption owing to lower prices and the diversion of crime to other areas, must also be borne in mind. Localized success stories were not necessarily transferable to other contexts, however, nor did legalization address the core problems associated with drugs. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) was the most appropriate forum for leading the debate on drug legalization from the technical standpoint. Indeed, it was through a technical approach, free of political considerations, that the drugs threat was best fought. Resources must therefore be mobilized to that end.

Mr. C. VELASCO (Ecuador) considered that breaking the taboo was to open up a crucial discussion for Latin America, which would otherwise be mired in the same problems as it had been for the past 50 years, including militarization of the drugs war and further social breakdown. Alternative drug policies without such fundamental implications for democracy, economy and culture as the policies of today were needed. Decriminalization or the State-controlled use of drugs would provide clarity and the courage must therefore be mustered to enact necessary legislation and jettison established ideologies. Control must be scientifically based, however, in order to avoid disparities among countries concerning legal quantities of drugs, which were after all a global industry, as indicated by the recent Latin American boom in synthetic drugs previously confined mainly to Europe.

Mrs. K. SIRIKOMUT (Thailand) noted that the drug epidemic had spread worldwide and that the connection between drugs and organized crime had long been recognized as a problem that transcended borders and required global solutions. Having considered drug legalization as a means of addressing the country's long-standing drug issue, the Thai authorities had concluded that it would not only motivate customers and suppliers to increase their consumption and production but would also give rise to other problems, such as theft, gambling and murder. Nor did they expect that it would prevent and control organized crime. In short, drug legalization remained a debatable issue for Thailand.

Mr. J.M. GALÁN (Colombia) welcomed the discussion; his country had a long history of war on drugs but until only recently it had been taboo to talk about changing the drug policy. The debate must be broadened in order to dispel some of the myths surrounding drugs, including through the collection of more scientific data. Colombia's new Drug Policy Advisory Commission and the International Drug Policy Reform Conference were achieving significant results in their work and the Colombian Parliament had unanimously adopted a bill he himself had tabled recognizing drug addiction as an illness and a public health issue and decriminalizing addicts, who needed medical help and not punishment. Public health and prevention measures could be included under regulation, which he saw as a middle approach preferable to the two extremes of either prohibition or legalization. It was children such as the one third in Colombia born without a responsible father in their lives who were most likely to fall into the drug trap. The IPU could play a defining role in broadening the debate.

Ms IM. FILA LEMINA (Congo) stated that her country had ratified key drug-related treaties and had anti-drug laws in place but law enforcers were themselves often caught up in the drug culture, which was a major problem. Children used as go-betweens for drug dealers also became addicts as a result of their exposure to that culture. Efforts must therefore be stepped up to prevent the involvement of children in drugs and to raise awareness of drugs as a public health problem, which was something she did in her own district. The media should furthermore be enlisted in those efforts in order to focus attention on prevention and publicize the harms of drug use.

Ms L. DAVIES (Canada) reported that the most critical problem in her own community was the criminalization of drug users and the needless deaths from overdoses of illegal drugs. The fact that the war on drugs had been a political rather than an evidence-based construct was a major challenge. People were calling for changes: decriminalization and focus on a health-based approach, harm reduction and drug policy reform, which must be debated at the national level. She wondered, however, if panellists agreed with her perception that the most important changes were being driven by local communities who witnessed the terrible impact of the war on drugs and of criminalization, which affected mostly poor people.

Mr D. HAWAZI (Singapore) expressed appreciation for the concerns raised by the two women panellists in that the impact on individuals, families and the fabric of society must be a key consideration in drug policymaking. Singapore had a small population but its position as an Asian air hub and a maritime and tourist centre increased the potential sources of incoming drugs. Nonetheless, it was relatively drug-free, due in part to its tough stance against drug trafficking and consumption. He respected the diversity of views expressed in the discussion and the right of every State to address its own concerns as it saw fit. Singapore, however, did not advocate harm-reduction measures that condoned and facilitated drug-taking, which conflicted with its national values, and nor did it regard the drug problem as unsolvable. It rejected the "drug peace" school of thought and based its treatment, rehabilitation and reintegration efforts on its view of drug addiction as a social-behavioural problem. It favoured harm prevention that underlined its zero-tolerance drug policy, adopting an integrated multi-agency and multipronged anti-drug approach that took into account the operating environment and relied on stringent legislation, effective enforcement, intensive preventive drug education and coordinated treatment and rehabilitation. Singapore's drug situation remained comparatively under control.

Mr I. BOUTKHIL (Algeria) stated that his country was engaged in continuous efforts to curb the use of all types of drugs. What criteria had been applied, however, to determine that the current drug policy had failed? Its failure did not yet appear to be absolute and would not decriminalization increase drug consumption and trafficking? The problem was that drug consumption and trafficking were facilitated through the bribery of officials and law enforcers, whose job was to combat the problem. Provision should therefore be made for their punishment on that score.

Mr S.S. HAQUE (India) commented that the combination of illicit drug use and organized crime damaged health and had deleterious social effects. Drug legalization was a complex issue, however. While it paved the way to new thinking on alternatives to the current enforcement-oriented regime of prohibition and might also boost government coffers, it could have unintended consequences, especially where law enforcement was weak. Those consequences might include criminal outbursts in other spheres; feeding the habit of addicts; higher levels of social paranoia and violence; more drug experimentation by youth; and the creation of a large black market for tax evasion purposes. Drug-related crimes and illegal drug syndicates would also persist insofar as a blanket legalization of all drugs was impossible because of the toxicity and high health costs associated with them. In the current drug climate, near universal adherence to

the international drug treaties should be welcomed. India's policy was to promote the scientific and medical use of narcotic drugs and to prohibit illicit traffic and abuse. Keys to combating the drug menace included demand reduction; better-coordinated intelligence-sharing and international cooperation; and prevention and awareness. India was committed to enhancing community safety and health by meaningfully reducing substance abuse and curbing crime through such measures.

Ms A. HUBER (Penal Reform International) opined that the criminalization of drug use was a failed response to the problem, particularly as little distinction was generally made between the criminal sanctions imposed for use and possession and for wide-scale trafficking linked with organized crime. Most drug convictions were for lesser offences and were responsible for a massive increase in prison populations. Studies also indicated that criminalization was a marginal deterrent to drug use and the World Drug Report 2012 had therefore recommended a rebalancing of drug control policy through alternative methods. The link between substance abuse and poverty was evidenced by the typical profile of users, whose criminalization and stigmatization drove them further into the poverty cycle; the criminalization of users, treatment and harm reduction measures had contributed indirectly to the global HIV/AIDS epidemic; and the death penalty for drug offences was retained in 33 countries. Parliamentarians were therefore urged to pursue criminal law reforms with a view to fair sentencing and decriminalization of personal possession. Drawing attention to her organization's briefing paper on the unintended consequences of the "war on drugs", she lastly reiterated a UNODC statement that drug dependency was a health disorder and that drug users needed humane and effective treatment - not punishment.

Ms M. CHAVEZ COSSIO (Peru) admitted that her country had made mistakes in its fight against cocaine production and was far from proud of its status as the world's largest cocaine producer, but legalization was not the answer. Peru had decriminalized personal drug consumption and legalized limited possession, which contradicted the fact that it remained a criminal offence to supply drugs for personal consumption. Legalization was the start of a slippery slope and even decriminalization sent the same wrong message that drug use was acceptable. It was regrettable that drug-consumer countries saw fit to allocate only limited resources to combating drug trafficking and finding social solutions in producer countries, such as alternative livelihoods in the case of Peru's cocaine growers. The issue was complex but legalization would be tantamount to capitulating by allowing drugs to continue killing and destroying families and societies. The fight must not be abandoned.

Ms S.M. ESCUDERO (Argentina) remarked that the economic factor was an important part of the equation in that drug trafficking was a highly lucrative business and had paradoxically benefited from the liberalization of finance and trade. The root causes of drug consumption, which included poverty and desperation, must be addressed in addition to problems such as the institutional fragility that bred corruption among politicians, judges and other officials. The war on drugs had done more harm than good and producer, transit and consumer countries must work together, including through forums like the present one, to pool scientific and other knowledge in order to identify reasonable alternatives for strengthening public policy with a view to prevention. Not forgetting the destructive power of sophisticated weaponry in the hands of criminal organizations, efforts must also be directed to the control of arms trafficking. In Argentina, where addiction was treated under the health system, drug consumption had not been decriminalized but there was a desire to broaden the debate going forward.

Mr. I. ALKOOHEJI (Bahrain) said that, with the exception of medication, all substances affecting the natural state of mind were prohibited in Islam. Consequently, the annual figure for drug-related offences in Bahrain stood at under 1,000. Treatment for drug addiction was also provided free of charge. The essential questions to be answered with respect to the legalization of drugs concerned the social impact and the activities into which organized crime would next venture instead in order to make profits.

Ms. Y. ATEK MEFTALI (Algeria) stated that drug use had been criminalized in Algeria from the outset. Criminalization was a preventive measure and treatment facilities were available for those who broke the law by taking drugs. If drug use was legalized, however, treatment facilities would have to be made available immediately for the many more people who would take legalization to mean that drug use was acceptable and embark on that path. Furthermore, would legalization also mean that sportspersons would be permitted to use drugs that enhanced their natural physical abilities?

Ms. A. RAMIREZ NAVA (Bolivia) indicated that the Bolivian Government was firmly committed to combating drug use and working with local communities to find alternative crops to coca, although coca leaves in their natural state were not a drug; their consumption had been a part of everyday life in Bolivia for centuries. Tighter controls had been introduced as part of the fight against drugs, but the technology needed to detect criminal activity was lacking. The international community must unite to tackle the scourge of drugs in the hope of achieving a drug-free world.

Mr. V. HERNÁNDEZ (Ecuador) observed that there were four key issues to consider when talking about drugs. First, as stated in the Ecuadorian Constitution, addiction was a public health problem and must be treated as such. Second, sentencing must be proportionate to the offence, distinguishing between major traffickers and small-time dealers, for example. That question of proportionality was currently being debated in Ecuador in the context of its new criminal code. Third, the drugs market was huge and market deregulation was known to benefit only those who wielded the most economic and financial power. If the market was clearly regulated, it would be possible to overcome the dichotomy between prohibition and legalization, which was the fourth issue to consider. Intermediate solutions would surely be found, but prohibition did not work and the debate must now move forward onto questions such as what should be legalized and how, what should be subject to prosecution and what form cooperation between consumer and producer countries might take. In the 21st century, the key issues in the legalization debate could no longer be brushed aside and must be tackled head on.

Mr. W. MADZIMURE (Zimbabwe) considered that to talk of decriminalization was to admit failure in dealing effectively with drug trafficking. Attention was not being paid to the reason behind the thriving drug trade, namely corruption. The establishment of accountability systems, especially for law enforcers, would resolve nothing unless the problem of corruption was addressed. All bank account funds must also be accounted for in order to stop money-laundering. In short, it was essential to strengthen accountability institutions and deal with corruption in order to address drug trafficking.

Mr. S.-I. BENOIT (Haiti) explained that Haiti's drug problems had started only after its military forces had been disbanded following the return of President Aristide in 1994, at which point it became the main transit country for drugs to North America. Drugs were trafficked via Haiti in huge quantities by sea and air and across the border with the Dominican Republic, but they were little used by Haitians. No arrests were made and the State was powerless in the face of such a large business encouraged by imperialist interests. His message to the United States and the United Nations occupiers of his country was that they had made the current mess and it was they who should clean it up.

Ms M. BRAWER (Argentina) opined that an in-depth analysis of the situation should be undertaken, drawing a distinction between legal and illegal drugs and between drug use, drug abuse and drug addiction. In Argentina, alcohol was the most consumed drug followed by prescription drugs and lastly, synthetic designer drugs. The biggest social problems were caused by the first two, which were legal. Limited possession of drugs for personal consumption was permitted on the basis of a Supreme Court ruling and treatment was provided for addicts. Over three quarters of drug convictions involved small-scale dealers, but to focus on them was tantamount to acting in complicity with traffickers. It was the large-scale drug trade that must be targeted. Lastly, drug use must be viewed in the context of today's capitalist world of instant gratification, status symbols and materialism.

Mr F.-X. DE DONNEA (Belgium) said that prohibition had been imposed on public health grounds and that it had generated huge wealth for criminal organizations, funded civil wars and rebellions, and led to a dramatic increase in drug consumption, especially among young people. Any overhaul of the system must be geared not only towards public health but also towards reducing both drug trafficking by organized criminals and the funding of rebel groups. Full legalization was not the best answer in terms of public health, as it would send a message to young people that drug use was not dangerous. It was therefore essential to find a middle way that balanced public health concerns with those relating to public order and public security.

Mr J.G. RIVERA LÓPEZ (Ecuador), speaking as someone from a country situated between the world's two biggest cocaine producers, said that the war on drugs was evidently in deep crisis. Despite all, weapons kept flooding in, but from where? He had his suspicions about their origin. The fight to end the scourge must continue but it must not be used as a geopolitical weapon of control. The impression given was that drugs cartels existed only in certain Latin American countries, whereas big businesses elsewhere were busy raking in cash. Key to dealing with the scourge were demand reduction and public accountability. As already suggested, State regulation of the drugs trade was among the alternative solutions to consider, in addition to the more radical solution of drug liberalization.

Mr C. BOUSSINOT (Guatemala) stated that Guatemala was among the Central American countries suffering a daily toll of drug-related murders. Its President had sought to raise the issue of drug regulation on the international agenda and a special session of the UN General Assembly on the world drug problem was now scheduled for 2016. Guatemalans were burying their casualties from a war that was not of their making, a war between consumer and producer countries, and it was at forums such as the present one that efforts must be made to take matters forward. Little attention was paid to the drug problem in Central America and he therefore wished to sound the alarm in the hope that it would be heard.

Mr J. FAKRO (Bahrain) said that the discussion led him to ask if terrorism would be the next to be legalized, adding that it was perhaps economic and political interests that prevented the whole world from coming together and waging the same successful fight against drugs as it had waged against organized terrorism. To legalize drugs would run counter to protecting individuals and society at large, damage the morals of young people and compromise values and principles. The very idea of drug regulation was truly sorrowful and it was discomfiting that parliamentarians should even be thinking about it. Drugs were a scourge on society and there should be no truck with the few rogue voices calling for the regulation of something that destroyed societies and values. The international community had united to fight the Taliban but why had it stopped burning the opium poppy fields in Afghanistan?

Mr. I. SALL (Parliament of the Economic Community of West African States - ECOWAS) said that the drug problem was familiar to all and that the nub of the issue, as encapsulated in the speech delivered by the President of Ecuador at the inaugural session of the Assembly, was that there were no quick-fix solutions because the world was controlled by a handful of individuals, organizations and superpowers and nothing could be done about what they had in mind for the future of the world.

Mr. A. GOBBI (Algeria) said that a global effort was needed to fight a complex global problem linked to organized crime and terrorism. Drug use was criminalized in Algeria, which was now both a transit and a consumer country. A national observatory had therefore been established to combat the drug menace. While it might be difficult to legalize drugs in a country with weak institutions, such as Afghanistan, there were surely other solutions to be found in that situation, otherwise nothing would change. The suggestion that a new way of attacking the problem would be to focus on the eradication of poverty and unemployment disregarded the fact that drug use and addiction were not confined to the poor; there were also drug users and addicts among the wealthy.

Ms. J. TEVES QUISPE (Peru) said that the role of parliamentarians was key; they were the lawmakers and must work for the interests of the people they represented. Hence, regardless of their political affiliations, they must support the control, regulation and enforcement efforts of their governments with respect to drug matters and seek to ensure that political groups worked in coordination and conjunction with the executive on those matters. It must be asked, however, whether the legalization or decriminalization of drugs was designed to benefit the public or certain other interests. The unquestionable point, however, was that IPU Members must work together on finding a solution to the global drug problem.

Ms. Z. GUDIÑO (Ecuador) said that clandestine drug use simply led to higher drug prices and harmed the poorest and most vulnerable. She recalled the harm done to ordinary people as a result of the war on drugs: thousands of cocaine farmers had been killed during the implementation of Plan Colombia in the late 1990s and food produce had been contaminated by chemicals dropped on illegal drug crops around the world. The illegal flow of drugs generating huge profits nevertheless continued unabated. More people were imprisoned for drug offences in the United States than anywhere else, a disproportionate number of them of African descent, including women, who also tended to receive longer sentences. The real solution would be to legalize drugs with a view to ending the link with organized crime and to provide support services for what was a public health issue. Legal provisions to that effect were currently being drafted in Ecuador.

Mr. J.C. MAHÍA (Uruguay) said that, as part of their legislative role, parliamentarians must encourage debate and engage civil society in the search for solutions, without preconceived notions or prejudices. Global forums such as the present panel discussion were an excellent means for exploring, in the light of accurate information and current realities, the solutions needed at the national, regional and international levels to address a problem that transcended national borders and to raise the profile of the debate. The prohibition approach driven by consumer countries had not worked and a paradigm shift was therefore needed towards focus on the middle-ground perspective of State involvement in the regulation of drugs.

Mr. H. MOHAMMED (United Republic of Tanzania), highlighting global issues to be brought to bear on the debate, cited an example provided by his country: it had borders with eight countries, raising the question of what the impact might be on its neighbours if it decided to legalize drugs and they did not. More must also be done to build capacities and resources for enabling drug producers to pursue other livelihoods. Corruption posed another serious problem.

National drug enforcement agencies could help to raise awareness of the dangers associated with the drug trade by sharing information with parliamentarians, political leaders and the public. Banks that facilitated drug-related transactions should be investigated and pharmaceutical companies purchasing drugs for use in manufacturing medicines should be monitored. Lastly, countries should exchange experiences concerning the success or failure of their punishment regimes.

Mr. E. NAYAP KININ (Peru) said that societies today operated on the premise that individual wealth equalled happiness, with the result that policies were driven by the quest for wealth. However, the lack of effort to share and spread that wealth created social injustice. The current Assembly was also debating the topic of moving on from unrelenting growth to harmonious living because those policies led to neither individual wealth nor healthy societies; money did not buy everything. The fight against drugs must encompass moral and spiritual issues, without which all respect for life was lost. It must also devote priority to early prevention and the enactment of legislation to punish offenders and provide security for citizens.

Mr. L. IDA (Indonesia) said that his country's position on the subject was clear; it had a law dedicated to combating illegal drug use, dealing and trafficking and it had established a National Narcotics Board. Illegal drug use claimed over 50 lives daily in Indonesia. The individuals behind the international drugs network had still not been identified, however, and parliamentarians might wish to set up a forum for that purpose.

Mr. P. MARTIN-LALANDE (France), speaking in his personal capacity, said that he welcomed the genuine debate on the topic, which was all the more essential in that a global solution to the drug problem was the only way forward. It must first be established whether drug use posed a serious risk to health and, if so, what the most effective way of reducing that risk might be. Possibilities included continuing the status quo of prohibition, with its negative results, permitting and teaching control or abstinence, and tackling the causes of drug use and demand. It must be decided whether to attach more importance to the health or the security risk and the pros and cons of possible strategies should also be compared for each drug type. Regardless of the strategy chosen, global agreement was essential and the IPU should therefore continue to work on the issue at future Assemblies.

Mr. S. BLANCO (Mexico) expressed the hope that parliamentarians would continue in their own countries to debate the issues raised during the discussion in order to highlight the problem, which was particularly serious in his country. The possession of small amounts of drugs was already decriminalized and the Mexican Congress was now considering legalization. Recreational marijuana use had been legalized in some parts of the United States, which was ironical in view of the extraterritorial war on drugs that it was waging. The IPU could perhaps conduct an in-depth analysis of the issues surrounding legalization and drugs and present proposals or adopt a resolution for discussion by parliaments around the world with a view to coordinating a global effort on the matter.

The MODERATOR invited the panellists to voice their thoughts on the discussion.

Ms. F.Z. NADIRI, Panellist, said that some very interesting and stimulating contributions had been made in the discussion. Concerning Afghanistan's own efforts, it had, with international assistance, developed an anti-narcotics strategy centred on measures for disrupting the drug trade, diversifying rural livelihoods, reducing demand and improving treatment facilities, and developing State institutions at the central and provincial levels. It was therefore moving forward, but the results thus far achieved were by no means adequate to address the immensity of the challenge. Aerial spraying had been employed to eradicate opium crops and manual destruction

was still practised, but it had been argued that eradication ultimately benefited traffickers and officials because it raised crop prices and drove farmers into the hands of insurgents and warlords. Afghanistan welcomed the debate, but legalization was too risky a step for it to take at the current stage. The remedies tried had proved to be no match for the strength of the global drug industry, which was ever growing in wealth and dominance at the expense of countries that suffered the consequences. Care must be taken, however, not to pursue remedies at the other extreme. In brief, parliamentarians must act collectively, globally and prudently to overcome the challenges posed by the drug menace in the 21st century.

Ms M. OBRADOVIĆ, Panellist, said that the discussion had painted an alarming picture, especially for someone like her with teenage children. Output on the subject from the Assembly could be a start towards finding the much talked-of global solution, which was the only way to tackle a problem without borders. The media should also be enlisted to campaign on the issue and parliamentarians must build on the energy from the meeting to take the debate further in their own countries.

Mr E. DE LA REGUERA, Panellist, said it was critical to ensure that the next stage of the legalization debate was based on scientific facts and investigations into the dangers of each individual drug. An important starting point was the evidence that not all users became addicts. The problem was that the money spent on drugs by even occasional users went to organizations that were tearing apart countries such as Mexico. More funding must therefore be channelled into research, which should have none of the blocks of the past placed on it. He added that the drug-related treaties of the future might have a regional rather than an international scope. All such issues must be part of the debate.

Mr J. CALZADA, Panellist, said that prohibition, which had been the byword until now, offered the worst blanket solution to the drug issue and that the significant contributions made during the discussion had therefore been very useful. It was dangerous to oversimplify and the debate must move beyond the black-and-white argument of prohibition versus legalization. No one could deny that alcohol and tobacco were drugs, yet they were legal. Some countries might introduce regulation on the basis of cultural or religious considerations, whereas others took a different approach, as in Uruguay. Criminalization and enforcement had only swelled the prison population with those convicted of lesser drug-related offences; greater police resources had not improved drug seizure rates; and prevention and education measures had not reduced consumption. A serious evidence-based debate was the way forward and in that context he recommended two works by Thomas Babor and others, which had been partly sponsored by the World Health Organization and would provide food for thought: *Alcohol: No Ordinary Commodity*, and *Drug Policy and the Public Good*.

The MODERATOR, outlining his reflections on the discussion, said that inaction would clearly have serious consequences and that positive measures needed to be taken by parliamentarians in order to lead public opinion included opening up the debate in their own parliaments and communities and questioning personal and cultural opinions on drugs. Issues identified as requiring consideration included decriminalization of possession, legalization of possession, and regulation of supply. The most important point, however, was to determine what action was best suited to a particular community and how to take that action forward. The opportunity to face the challenge of halting a major disaster of universal proportions through a cause-and-effect solution, and in a rational manner, must not be lost. Indeed, the test of any civilized society was how it treated issues that affected humanity. He thanked all parliamentarians and the panellists for their insightful contributions to the discussion.

The meeting rose at 11.55 a.m.