



## **PRESS RELEASE**

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# **World Drug Day (26 June) – Statement by the Global Commission on Drug Policy**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

*(Geneva, 26/06/2023)*

June 26 is a day dedicated to raising awareness about the consequences of repressive drug policies and practices on people across the globe. There is growing recognition around the world that drug prohibition has failed to achieve its goals of promoting the “health and the wellbeing of humanity”. History has repeatedly demonstrated that punitive drug policies systematically lead to human rights violations and abuses: discriminatory police checks targeting already marginalized communities, disproportionate sentencing, arbitrary detention, extrajudicial killings, torture, and even the death penalty. Drug prohibition has also restricted access to controlled medicines that are essential for people living with avoidable pain.

Now, seventy-five years after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), and with just over seven years to go until the date for achieving the **Sustainable Development Goals** (SDGs), it is urgent to align laws and policies related to drugs with human rights norms and standards.

This year’s theme for World Drug Day is “people first, stop stigma and discrimination, strengthen prevention”. Since 2011, the **Global Commission on Drug Policy** has highlighted how people who use drugs, and people from marginalized communities and minorities, carry the heaviest burden of existing repressive drug policies. Fear of arrest and widespread stigma are inhibiting people who use drugs from accessing harm reduction services and healthcare and social services.

The Global Commission proposes “**Five Pathways to Drug Policies that Work**”: put health first, guarantee access to controlled medicines, decriminalize the consumption and the possession of drugs for personal use, focus law enforcement on the persons running criminal organizations and, last but not least, legally regulate drug markets in order to disempower organized crime. Legal regulation is both a public health imperative and a necessary step to advance drug policy reform.

More and more governments around the world are taking first steps toward legal regulation. In the Americas, for example, Colombia is working towards legalizing the sale of recreational cannabis to adults. In Europe, Germany, and several other countries in the region, is drafting a law which would provide for the “*controlled distribution of cannabis to adults for consumption purposes in licensed shops*”. In Asia, in June last year, Thailand, after having legalized cannabis use for medical purposes in 2018, became the first country to decriminalize the growing of cannabis and its consumption in food and drinks. In early 2020, the Government of the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) became the first Australian jurisdiction to decriminalize the use and possession of small amounts of the most common illicit drugs.

Harm reduction and innovative drug dependence treatments are also now broadly recognized as good practices. For example, in Africa, needle and syringe programs (NSPs) are now operating in Benin, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Guinea, Kenya, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Uganda, among others.

The Global Commission on Drug Policy calls for more of such constructive actions in policy and practice by national and local governments. It also calls on the United Nations agencies to implement their **Common Position Paper on Drugs (2018)** in their programming around the world. The consequences of unjust drug policies are widespread in most aspects of individual and collective life. It is a common responsibility for all committed to health, social wellbeing, economic integration and development, to overcome discrimination and stigmatization, and uphold human rights for all.

## About the Global Commission on Drug Policy

In 2011, with the aim of opening an honest debate on drugs and inspiring better drug policies globally - based on a commitment to human rights and respect for the findings of scientific endeavour - former Heads of State and Government from the Americas and Europe created the **Global Commission on Drug Policy** (hereinafter, the "Global Commission").

The Global Commission now has 29 Commissioners from around the world who - aware of the failure of the current international drug control regime - lend their voices and political and social influence to raise drug policy issues across all levels.

At the international level, Commissioners act as global ambassadors for drug policy reform by cultivating strategic partnerships and reaching out to a diverse multi sectoral audience including community representatives and high-level decision makers. At regional, national and local levels, the Commissioners tailor their actions to the specific contexts and issues, capitalizing on their diverse geographic representation and knowledge.

In its first decade of life, the Global Commission built an important corpus of drug policy-related material, including eleven **reports**:

- The War on Drugs, 2011
- The War on Drugs and HIV/AIDS, How the Criminalization of Drug Use fuels the Global Pandemic, 2012
- The Negative Impact of the War on Drugs on Public Health: The Hidden Hepatitis C Epidemic, 2013
- Taking Control: Pathways to Drug Policies that Work, 2014
- The Negative Impact of Drug Control on Public Health: The Global Crisis of Avoidable Pain, 2015
- Advancing Drug Policy Reform: a new approach to decriminalization, 2016
- The World Drug [Perception] Problem: Countering prejudices about people who use drugs, 2017
- Regulation: The Responsible Control of Drugs, 2018
- Classification of Psychoactive Substances: When Science was Left Behind, 2019
- Enforcement of Drug Laws: Refocusing on Organized Crime Elites, 2020
- Time to End Prohibition, 2021

Five thematic **position papers**:

- The Opioid Crisis in North America, October 2017
- Drug Policy and the Sustainable Development Agenda, September 2018
- Drug Policy and Deprivation of Liberty, June 2019
- Drug Policy and City Government, 2021
- Drug Policy in Colombia - The Road to a Just Regulation, 2022

One feature-length documentary and one animated short film:

- Breaking the Taboo, Sundog Pictures, June 2011
- The History of the War on Drugs, Almap/BBDO, August 2014

The Global Commission is an independent, non-partisan and non-profit organisation hosted by the **Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies (IHEID)** in Geneva, Switzerland.

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