

**FROM: THE INTERNATIONAL COALITION OF NGOS FOR JUST AND EFFECTIVE
DRUG POLICIES**

**TO: THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE COMMISSION ON NARCOTIC DRUGS,
UNITED NATIONS, VIENNA**

Vienna, 11 March, 2002

Dear ladies and gentlemen:

Our Coalition, composed by 114 NGOs from 28 countries across the world, represents, among others, millions of citizens who experience the day-to-day reality of the drug problem, and failing drug control policies, in their own lives. We propose policies that are based on public health, science, sustainable development and human rights. With this letter, we wish to make some recommendations related with the topic of Alternative Development, which occupies a central place in the current meeting of the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs.

Alternative development

The root cause of many of the problems surrounding the production of and trade in drugs is the fact that they are illegal. In our view, the global regime of drugs prohibition urgently needs to be replaced with national or regional drug policies that are primarily shaped from the perspective of public health and sustainable development.

Obviously, when prohibition is replaced by more efficient ways of regulating the drugs market, this may not be as profitable for small peasants and traders as the illegal activities that we witness in the present situation. This underscores the importance of Alternative Development, which should be a core ingredient of any drug policy, and an important tool to accompany the transition towards a more just and effective drugs policy.

Alternative development (AD) should contain measures in the economic, political and social field, taken in consensus with all the involved sectors, in order to diminish the dependence on the cultivation of plants used in the production of illicit drugs by small peasants in developing countries, safeguarding the licit and culturally accepted use of these plants.

These measures are, of course, incompatible with operations of forced eradication and with strategies aiming at the destruction of crops. These approaches, aiming at the complete elimination of drug-linked cultivation, such as the devastating practices of aerial fumigations with chemical herbicides and the considered use of biological agents for eradication, have an extremely negative impact on the environment and human health.

The current situation

In the political declaration of UNGASS, agreed upon in June of 1998, emphasis is put on the need to establish political and financial long term commitment between donor and recipient

countries to a balanced approach of AD and law enforcement in order to confront illicit cultivation.

Four years later, neither the AD programmes nor the operations of forced eradication have had a significant impact on the production of drugs at global level. According to figures of the UNDCP, the production of cannabis, coca leaves and opium has remained stable in recent years. The only exception has been last year's dramatic decrease of opium cultivation in Afghanistan, which, however, will not be sustainable. On the main consumption markets, the wholesale and retail prices have decreased while purity increases. This means that there is no shortage on the market, and there rather exists a trend of increasing drugs supply.

In the UNGASS declaration, reference is also made to the need to establish a balance between measures of supply and demand reduction. We conclude that the figures of the main consuming countries (United States and Europe) demonstrate that demand has not fallen. Here, there is also a slight tendency of increase.

It should be added that access to data on the drugs market continues to be extremely difficult. For example, the official figures that are published on illicit cultivation are not reliable, and the various sources often contradict each other. Their value for the debate about the effectiveness of policies is therefore limited. We request more sincerity in the handling of these data by national and international authorities.

Our recommendations

The structural problems that derive from poverty in the countries that produce coca leaves, opium poppies and cannabis are determining factors for the increase of this cultivation; consequently, AD should become a core element of national plans of integrated, sustainable and concerted development in the corresponding countries.

In this sense we consider that a philosophy of harm reduction could well be applied to the policies towards drugs producing countries. In those European countries and cities where harm reduction forms the basis of rational policies on the drugs consumption side, the incompatibility with repressive focuses is obvious and explicit.

Governments should not criminalize small farmers. As in the approach of the reduction of harm for drug abusers, they should try to provide conditions that allow farmers to diminish their financial dependence on illicit crops. If that does not work, farmers should not be killed, imprisoned or fumigated, but receive assistance in order to continue in a way that reduces the damages for themselves and society in general.

Our concrete recommendations to improve AD programmes are:

- 1. Programmes should neither be made conditional to a prior elimination of drug crop cultivation nor should a reduction be enforced on small producers.***
- 2. In no case should the land be fumigated with the result that nothing can be grown on the area attacked. Research needs to be urgently carried out to make those areas which have already been subject to biological and chemical attacks cultivatable again.**
- 3. Programmes should be designed through open spaces for dialogue with small producers**

without deadlines nor 'zero option' philosophies.

4. Programmes should reduce the harm done to environment resulting from illicit cultivation and the use of chemical precursors in the manufacturing of drugs.

5. Options should be explored to establish direct links among the reduction of harm on the supply and demand side. For example, use of raw material produced by communities in developing countries to supply the programmes of controlled distribution of drugs in countries where their use is accepted (e.g. *papaver somniferum* as the source of opiates for medical purposes such as analgesics).

6. Programmes should contribute to a climate where illicit drugs are no longer demonised, and information is available on their potential damages and benefits, on the basis of scientific studies. One way of doing this is to allow the export of beneficial coca leaf products to the international markets, through so-called 'Fair Trade' schemes.

Finally, it is important that the international community establishes financing mechanisms that allow the implementation of alternative development programmes and guarantee access to the market for alternative products. However, we also recommend improving the transparency in the use of funds for AD, the participation of local farmers in the implementation of programmes and a greater coherence of international economic and financial policies with the objective of promoting Alternative Development.

We hope that these concerns and recommendations are considered when you decide on future policies and would be happy to further discuss the approaches described above, or to provide further information on them.

Yours sincerely,

International Coalition of NGO's for Just and Effective Drug Policies (ICN)

* The first recommendation is literally taken from the Declaration of Feldafing, edited by about 80 international experts in Alternative Development who were united by the government of Germany and the UNDCP in a Conference in January 2002. The other recommendations, we feel, largely coincide with the spirit of this Declaration.

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