

**EUROPEAN COALITION FOR JUST AND EFFECTIVE DRUG POLICIES – ENCOD vzw**

Lange Lozanastraat 14, 2018 Antwerpen, Belgium  
Telephone: +32 (0) 3 237 7436 / Mobile: +32 (0) 495 122644  
Fax: +32 (0)3 237 0225  
e-mail: [encod@glo.be](mailto:encod@glo.be)/ [www.encod.org](http://www.encod.org)

**From 12 to 16 March 2007, the 50th annual meeting of the United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs will take place in Vienna. This will be the last time this Commission meets before the crucial deadline of 2008, when an evaluation should be presented of the global efforts on drug control in the past ten years. An ENCOD-representative will be present at this meeting. ENCOD will present the following statement, signed by the Steering Committee Members.**

Vienna, 12 March 2007

Dear delegates,

On behalf of the European Coalition for Just and Effective Drug Policies, a platform of more than 150 citizens' associations from around Europe, we wish to ask your attention to the following.

Nine years ago in New York, during the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Drugs in June 1998, a political declaration was adopted mentioning two important objectives and a target date. In the 1998 declaration, the UN General Assembly committed itself to 'achieving significant and measurable results in the field of demand reduction' as well as to 'eliminating or reducing significantly the illicit cultivation of the coca bush, the cannabis plant and the opium poppy' by the year 2008.

The failure of these policies is witnessed every day by citizens, farmers living in coca and opium producing areas in South America and Asia, by people in jails, on dancefloors, in coffeeshops, in user rooms, and even in institutional corridors such as this one.

According to figures recently published by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, the annual prevalence of drug use\* in the USA, the country with the largest investments in demand reduction, has shown significant increase with regards to ecstasy, opiates and cocaine. The annual prevalence of cocaine use increased from 2.6% in 2000 to 2.8 % in 2004, and we see an even larger increase in the use of cannabis, from 8,3% in 2000 to 12,6 % in 2004. With amphetamine use the same thing: from 0,9% in 2000 to 1,5% in 2004.

Drug use and drug production are increasing everywhere, not only in the USA. Concerning the global production of illicit drugs, the amount of opium produced has increased from 4.346 tons in 1998 to 4.620 tons in 2005, cocaine has increased from 825 tons in 1998 to 910 tons in 2005 and cannabis from an estimated 30.000 tons in 1998 to 42.000 tons in 2005 (a third of which is produced in North America, making it by far the largest producer of cannabis for its home market).

It is obvious that the global efforts to 'eliminate or significantly reduce drugs demand and supply' before the 2008 deadline have not been successful. However, these efforts have caused considerable and increasing damage to human rights, public health, environment, the economy, sustainable development, the respect for law and the relations between citizens and authorities across the world.

A classic argument for maintaining the iron prohibition regime is that without it levels of drugs use and production would be higher than now. But nowhere has any scientific argumentation been presented that shows that prohibition regimes curb drug use. Inside Europe and even within European countries enormous differences are observed in levels of drug use in spite of the fact that in all these different countries prohibition regimes are enforced. Any attempt to explain such differences is lacking, making the inference that drug policy has influence at all weak, not to say improbable.

In a year from now, you will have to take an important decision. Will you ignore history? Will you continue going down the same destructive but largely ineffective road? When you meet here in this room in March 2008, you need to have some sort of a story! Your government or organisation needs to present its conclusions for the past 10 years, as well as its recommendations for the future.

Essentially, you have two choices. You can either ignore the evidence, and continue on this cruel, costly, ineffective and counterproductive affair called the War on Drugs;

Or, you can begin to discuss how to bring reflection and common sense to this issue, you can start to modify our outmoded and ineffective international drug legislation in such a way as to allow countries to create drug policies that will be more effective in reducing the many harms produced by current drug policy itself. Reducing the harms of drug use is a relatively small affair compared to reducing drug policy related harms. Together with many others, ENCOD sees prohibition related harms as many times more extensive, pervasive and destructive than drug related harms.

Global drug policy shows confusing elements. On the one hand, hundreds of millions of people around the world are actual victims of drug policies. People are now killed, tortured, imprisoned, stigmatised and ruined for growing, trading or consuming substances that have accompanied mankind for thousands of years. Even those in the drug field who practice public health types of harm reduction are criminalised in certain areas of the world.

On the other hand, 'harm reduction' has been embraced by many local and regional authorities as an effective approach to the most urgent health problems related to drug use. Harm reduction measures originate from the principle that health and safety are more important than moral judgements, but such measures are often seriously jeopardized by the bureaucratic framework that manages and interprets the UN Treaties.

In most European countries, the possession of small quantities of cannabis is no longer considered an offence. In countries where the distribution of cannabis for personal use is depenalised, such as the Netherlands, local authorities are increasingly in favour of organising a transparent circuit of cannabis cultivation, distribution and consumption by adults. Those authorities have started to understand that legal regulation is the way to reduce criminality and health problems, not blind prohibition.

The government of Bolivia is now calling for the international depenalisation of the coca leaf as a way to recognise the significant nutritional, medicinal and cultural value of coca. In fact, Bolivia has the right to repeal the UN Convention of 1961, since the prohibition of coca leaves that is included in that Convention is not based on scientific evidence. Allowing the export of tea and other beneficial coca derivatives would help to alleviate the dependence of coca farmers on the illegal sector, replacing it with a sustainable economy based on renewable agricultural resources.

Likewise, the depenalisation of opium cultivation, allowing the use of this substance for the already existing legal purposes, could become an important option to increase living standards and human rights for people in Afghanistan, Burma and other countries.

Will Vienna 2008 mark the start of a different era in drug policy? We doubt it. What is needed is the creation of the legal and political space for local, regional and national authorities to apply policies that are not based on total prohibition.

However we see and deplore that the system of drug control - expanded and enlarged since 1910 - has become a phenomenal and counterproductive obstacle in the way of innovation and harm reduction. The UN Conventions do not allow for any development, and force upon the world an obsolete system of worldwide Prohibition that for alcohol has long been discredited and abandoned. Any regime change, however small, needs the cooperation of almost 200 countries! The world has imprisoned itself inside this system, and thrown away the key.

Will Vienna 2008 be an opportunity for all those who wish to find a sensible solution to drug related problems ? Will Vienna 2008 start to end the massive damage done by drug policies, damage that is arguably many times greater than that resulting from drug use itself?

We will be here again in one year.

Best wishes,

On behalf of ENCOD,

Christine Kluge, Germany  
Marina Impallomeni, Italy  
Virginia Montañes, Spain  
Farid Ghehioeuhe, France  
Jan van der Tas, Netherlands  
Joep Oomen, Belgium