

**Press release**  
**For immediate release**

## **United Nations drug policy review: Out of ideas and out of touch**

As political leaders from around the world gather this week in Vienna to review the last decade of international drug control, and set a framework for the next ten years with the signing of a Political Declaration, any hopes for progress or a new pragmatism in approaches to the world drug problem are fading fast.

The UN High-Level Meeting on the 11 and 12 March is a culmination of a two-year review of progress against the objectives and commitments made by the UN General Assembly in 1998. It is now clear that the key objective of a decade ago - 'eradicating or significantly reducing...' the scale of global markets for illegal drugs such as heroin, cocaine and cannabis - has not been met. The market in illicit drugs has not been reduced and indeed, in many parts of the world, the market and the problems associated with it are spiralling out of control.

**The Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND), the UN body responsible for drug policy, is demonstrably out of touch...**

**...with reality:**

- the UN's own figures suggest there are over 200 million current users of illegal drugs (this tally is itself widely considered as an underestimate )
- the global drugs market produces annual profits of over \$300 billion for increasingly powerful organised crime groups.
- democratically elected governments in countries as diverse as Afghanistan, Mexico and Guinea-Bissau struggle to maintain control of their own territories due to the impact of the drug trade and associated criminal activities.
- over 80% of the world's population have no access to cheap and simply produced painkilling medications because of the controls placed on them by UN conventions on illicit drugs.

Despite these and many other irrefutable problems, the CND seems poised to agree a declaration that claims satisfying progress, and proposes no new strategies.

**...with the rest of the UN system:**

- successive reviews of the global evidence on HIV/AIDS prevention have concluded that harm reduction approaches are the best way to tackle epidemics related to injecting drug use.
- harm reduction approaches are accepted and promoted by the entire public health profession, all the multilateral bodies charged with fighting the global AIDS pandemic – UNAIDS, the World Health Organisation, the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis – and all other UN agencies and Commissions.

Despite this evidence-based consensus, the CND, in a stubbornly isolationist move, has voted to exclude any mention of harm reduction from its declaration. The CND appears determined to deny the very existence of a set of practices that are successfully implemented in over 80 countries around the world.

Over 300 non-governmental organisations (NGOs), working across the spectrum of drug prevention, treatment and policy, have presented a consensus call for drug use to be addressed by the UN as a public health and human rights issue, rather than a criminal justice one. Many senior UN figures - the heads of UNAIDS and the Global Fund, and the Special Rapporteurs on Torture and Health, have made similar calls in recent months. All have been ignored by the CND.

Fortunately, some governments have challenged this complacency, and are planning to register objections to some aspects of the Political Declaration this week.

**The IDPC calls on all national delegations in Vienna to go further still, by refusing to endorse the declaration, and issuing a call for further efforts across the UN system to find a more effective response to the world drug problem.**

Mike Trace, Chair of the International Drug Policy Consortium and former deputy UK drugs tsar, said today:

"This high level review should have been an opportunity for the international community to balance, modernise and humanise the drug control system; we need to move away from the 'war on drugs' in order to focus on reducing the health risks and social harms associated with drug use and drug markets.

"Unfortunately, the negotiations have produced a weak and incoherent Political Declaration that calls for more of the same ineffective and often counterproductive strategies, ensuring this opportunity for progress – this opportunity to save thousands of lives - will be lost.

"The Commission on Narcotic Drugs has shown itself to be out of step with the rest of the UN system, with professional and expert opinion, and with the reality experienced by millions of ordinary citizens around the world."

#### **ENDS**

#### **Notes to editors:**

**For further information or to arrange interviews with the Chair of the IDPC, or other spokespersons in our network, please contact Ruth Goldsmith, Communications Manager at DrugScope (IDPC member) at [ruthg@drugscope.org.uk](mailto:ruthg@drugscope.org.uk), or on 020 7520 7559 or 07801 845192.**

**The IDPC have developed a media pack in preparation for this week's High Level Meeting, containing articles written by experts in drug policy, human rights and public health and exploring key issues around the failings of current international drug policy. If you would like a copy, please email [ruthg@drugscope.org.uk](mailto:ruthg@drugscope.org.uk)**

#### **About the IDPC**

The International Drug Policy Consortium (IDPC) is a global network of 32 national and international NGOs that specialise in issues related to illegal and legal drug use. IDPC promotes objective and open debate on the effectiveness, direction and content of drug policies at national and international level, and supports evidence-based policies that are effective in reducing drug-related harm. To find out more, visit [www.idpc.info](http://www.idpc.info)

#### **About the CND**

To find out more about the 52<sup>nd</sup> session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, visit <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/commissions/CND/session/52.html>