



JAMAICA'S REGULATED CANNABIS INDUSTRY: FIRST STEPS

A BECKLEY FOUNDATION CONFERENCE IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE
JAMAICAN MINISTRY OF JUSTICE AND THE MINISTRY OF INDUSTRY,
INVESTMENT AND COMMERCE

13-14 NOVEMBER 2015 – NEGRIL JAMAICA

THE FAILURE OF THE WAR ON DRUGS, AND JAMAICA'S PIONEERING JOURNEY
TOWARDS REGULATION

BY AMANDA FEILDING

Thank you Minister Golding for inviting me and the Beckley Foundation to support you and the Jamaican government in the development of a comprehensive drug policy for Jamaica.

It is wonderful that Jamaica has now not only *decriminalised* cannabis, eliminating previous convictions for possession, but has also fully acknowledged the religious rights of the Rastafarians, thus becoming the first state to properly recognise the religious use of cannabis.

I'm delighted to be working with the Jamaican government, and other experts, in organising this conference, where leaders in the field can discuss how best to introduce a fully-regulated industry for medical-cannabis. The outcome of these and other discussions will feed into the process for the 2016 United Nations General Assembly Special Session on global drug policy.

It is an honour to be working at the forefront of this vitally important area. Jamaica is such a beautiful *jewel* of an island, much loved and respected throughout the world, with a global recognition far above its small size. It is the one place in the world where cannabis-use has a positive reputation, due to its association with the Rastafarians, and with Reggae music.

On the global scene I think we have finally reached a 'tipping point'. The 'intellectual' battle against the 'War on Drugs' has, for the most part, been won. Most intelligent people realise that it is impossible to eradicate a market through prohibition. Where there is a demand, there will always be a way to fill it. Criminalisation of cannabis has caused *untold* suffering around the world, while its prevalence has increased dramatically since it was banned.

However, that is merely the 'intellectual' battle, the 'battle on the ground' has only just begun, and that is where Jamaica is now leading the way.

The desire to alter consciousness is part of human nature. Altering states of consciousness has, from the very beginning, been deeply interwoven with the *evolution* of human society, including the creation of music, language, art, medicine, spirituality and community bonding.

By banning many of the favoured techniques of altering consciousness, the United Nations, and the governments of the world, are trespassing deeply into personal liberty and human rights. If a person is not in any way damaging anyone else by their actions, it should be their freedom to choose their preferred state of consciousness. This basic right “to the free development of personality” was recently recognised by the Supreme Court in Mexico.

There is no doubt that the ‘War on Drugs’ approach to the control of psychoactive substances has been a *disaster*, with *catastrophic* consequences at every level. I cannot think of another civil decision that has caused so much global suffering.

Prohibition of psychoactive substances has created a vast criminal market, run by individuals, often acting with a ruthlessness which shakes the fabric of civilised society.

Prohibition leads to the drugs consumed getting ever stronger: opium, to heroin; coca, to crack-cocaine; and traditional cannabis, to high-THC super-skunk. The illegal market has become a cancer in society causing illness, violence, corruption, and even the destabilisation of countries and regions. It is not the drugs themselves that cause these problems, but the effects of the policies controlling them.

Prohibition further obstructs the access of 80% of the world’s population to *essential medicines*, such as pain medication, access to which is a basic human right. Prohibition also *obstructs scientific research*, into the potential benefits of cannabis and other controlled substances; medicines, that if researched and used appropriately, could relieve immense suffering globally.

It would have been much better if these substances had remained as an integral part of the social fabric, controlled by social pressure, with the purpose of minimising harms and optimising benefits. Personally, I think it was a *disaster* to relegate one of the biggest industries in the world to criminal cartels, rather than for the governments of the world, with their boards of experts, working out scientifically, the safest, and most cost-effective ways of managing this human desire to alter consciousness.

As we all know, the drug laws are *not* based on scientific knowledge. Alcohol and tobacco - two legal methods of altering consciousness - can be extremely damaging to health and expensive to society. They would never have been permitted under current health criteria.

The legal basis of prohibition – the UN conventions – created by the USA, which surprisingly, does not feel bound to obey them itself - was not based on scientific evidence, but rather on political ideology, vested interests and prejudices. The conventions have stood like sacred scriptures – unaltered by the advances of science over the last 55 years – not a word has been changed! It is now time to update these conventions, so that individual countries can experiment with new approaches that *they* think would better serve the health and well-being of their citizens.

The Jamaican government must be applauded for its brave decision to go beyond mere *decriminalisation* of cannabis possession, and to *legalise* home cultivation for medicinal, spiritual and sacramental use – thereby recognising the religious rights of the Rastafari community - and to create a new licensed industry for medicinal cannabis and hemp. It is to be hoped that the new legal framework will ensure that the potential benefits to the citizens and the nation are maximised.

There are many advantages to a legal, regulated market. Criminalising users can ruin lives, fill prisons and cause immense suffering to individuals and their families. A *strictly* regulated market is better able to protect the youth, by not selling to minors, by labelling the products, by prohibiting advertising and by providing credible information and treatment where necessary.

Furthermore, the savings on enforcement, and money raised by taxation, can fund improved education, treatment and research. By recognising the potential medicinal value of cannabis, Jamaica opens the doors to scientific research and the freedom of doctors to prescribe cannabis for the treatment of many illnesses. It will also open the door to Jamaica becoming *an island of well-being* for foreign visitors, providing clinics with cannabis-assisted therapy for the treatment of many problematic conditions, such as depression, addiction, post-traumatic stress and pain. With careful management, this could become a valuable source of income and foreign exchange.

With the Jamaican government's commitment to medical research, and the expertise of the scientific community in Jamaica, research into cannabis can now flourish. The Beckley Foundation greatly looks forward to collaborating in this exciting movement, which has the potential to open up new avenues of treatment, and thereby end much suffering worldwide.

I set up the Beckley Foundation in 1998 with the dual purpose of reforming global drug policies, and opening up scientific research into the potential medical and therapeutic benefits of cannabis, and of other psychoactive substances.

For the last 17 years, based on health, harm-reduction, cost-effectiveness and respect of human rights - and have simultaneously opened up scientific research into the potential medicinal and therapeutic benefits of cannabis and other traditional plants. It is therefore a delight for me to be accompanying the Jamaican people on this exciting new journey.

If Jamaica could crystallise this potential, it would not only benefit its citizens and the economy, but also enhance the position of Jamaica in the world. It would be wonderful if Jamaica's reputation at the forefront of athletics and music, could be mirrored by a reputation for leadership in the field of the regulation, and medical use, of cannabis.

Over the years, I and the Beckley Foundation have worked in collaboration with leading academic institutions around the world, undertaking scientific research and clinical studies into the beneficial effects of cannabis. We are now looking forward to working with Jamaican universities, and Rastafari communities to cultivate and undertake scientific research on different strains of cannabis. We will particularly focus on strains that have a therapeutic balance of THC, CBD and other cannabinoids and terpenes, in order to optimise

the pain-relieving qualities and other medicinal applications, such as the treatment of cancer and overcoming addiction. The Foundation is currently working with University College London to compare the effects of different strains of cannabis with varying THC/CBD ratios, using brain-imaging technology.

I also look forward to focussing on Jamaica's indigenous strains or 'landrace strains', which have become almost extinct in today's cannabis market. We will preserve and study these landraces in order to protect the genetic diversity and conserve it as part of the Rastafari cultural heritage.

The Beckley Foundation is unique in working in both the scientific and policy fields, which are in fact interdependent. Since 2011, there has been a seismic shift in favour of drug policy reform. Finally, intelligent and respected people worldwide have realised that prohibition does not work, and that we need a more subtle approach to drug policies, that takes account of reality, and which aims to minimise harms at every level, while respecting the freedom of individual choice.

In 2006, I realised that although cannabis constituted 80% of illicit drug use, it was almost never mentioned at international organisations such as the UN, so I convened the Beckley Foundation's *Global Cannabis Commission*. Its subsequent report, *Cannabis Policy: Moving beyond Stalemate*, written by the leading academics in the field, recommended *decriminalisation* and regulation, and has been highly influential in the USA and around the world.

In 2010 I commissioned a report *Roadmaps for Reforming the UN Drug Conventions*, in order to provide a framework for countries, or groups of countries, to develop alternative drug policies, explaining how countries might amend their international obligations in order to allow them more freedom to formulate national policies that better suit their special needs, in place of the current 'one-size-fits-all' prohibitionist approach mandated by the UN Drug Conventions of 1961, 1971 and 1988. This report was pioneering in showing how countries might clearly and explicitly *decriminalise* the possession and use of controlled substances, such as cannabis, and move towards a *fully regulated* and taxed market.

As research into the beneficial therapeutic potential of this extraordinary plant continues, the global market for cannabis products is likely to grow substantially. We live in exciting times, as the edifice of drug prohibition is beginning to crumble, and the realisation of the amazing properties of this unique plant continue to grow.

I hope that the United Kingdom will learn some lessons from Jamaica's progress, and will at least *begin* by recognising the rights of those in need of access to cannabis for medicinal and religious purposes.

I would like to again thank Minister Mark Golding, for inviting me to help organise this pivotal event, in the setting of the RastaFest, and also to thank all of you who have taken time out of your busy schedules to attend this conference, and help move forward this vital endeavour towards greater health and happiness.