



**BECKLEY**  
FOUNDATION

## CASE STUDIES IN THE LIBERALISATION OF DRUG POLICY

CHAired BY MIKE TRACE, CHAIR, INTERNATIONAL DRUG POLICY  
CONSORTIUM

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CHAIR, INTERNATIONAL DRUG POLICY CONSORTIUM

*“Deterrence activities actually serve to increase harshness and marginalisation.  
Logically, it is hard to see how this would reduce the likelihood of drug use.”*

Mike Trace

Mike Trace introduced the IDPC and himself as its Chair, and explained that the second session of the day would focus on the notion of ‘deterrence’ and demand reduction.

### INTRODUCTION

The IDPC is one of the mechanisms for sharing and debating information that was mentioned in the previous session. Being a non-governmental structure, the IDPC has the disadvantage of having no automatic access to governments, although many members come from a government background. However, the IDPC has the advantage of being able to express opinions more freely, and to talk about issues that are more difficult to discuss in formal government settings.

The present session deals with examples of reform related to a key concept of the global drug control system that has been in effect for the last 50 years, namely the concept of *deterrence*. The concept of demand reduction through deterrence is based on the idea that potential drug users are deterred from using drugs by the risk of being caught and being subjected to harsh punishments. This idea has always had a certain amount of flawed logic to it, as we now know that the reasons people decide to use drugs include fashion and peer pressure, psychology and emotional states, and social context (i.e., the harshness or marginalisation of individuals within society). Deterrence activities

actually serve to increase that harshness and marginalisation. Logically, it is hard to see how this would reduce the likelihood of drug use. But also, in practice, policies and programmes based on deterrence have been very expensive to governments; the obvious financial costs are those of policing, courts, and imprisonment, but it also includes social costs. For example, Kasia Malinowska-Sempruch's earlier presentation showed the impact of a deterrence approach on one particular health problem, namely HIV epidemics.

Having just returned from a workshop in South-East Asia, it is clear that Governments and NGOs there, too, talk about the dilemma with global drug policies at the moment and what governments should do about it. Many countries are looking at ways to reduce their reliance on deterrence-based policies and programmes. It is important to take great care in looking at this issue, especially with respect to the terminology used. There are many ways to move away from deterrence-based policies, and they do not all involve legalisation or decriminalisation, so it is necessary to be very careful with the description of models. The IDPC is planning a briefing paper on different terminologies around the subject, and particularly on translation of the terminology, as, e.g., de-penalisation has different meanings in English, French, and Spanish.