

## PREFACE

This seminar, *Global Drug Policy - Future Directions*, is the fourth in a series of seminars entitled, *Society and Drugs: a Rational Perspective*. It is the first to focus on international drug policy.

We are living in a time when a large proportion of the population use controlled substances. Forty years of prohibition has done nothing to extinguish the use of psychoactive drugs. Indeed they are purer, cheaper and more readily available than ever before. Society may have to face the fact that many of its members wish to manipulate their consciousness, either by using legal substances such as alcohol, caffeine or tobacco, or by illegal means. The question faced by governments globally should maybe evolve from how to eliminate drug use, to how to minimise the damage done by it, both to the individual and to society at large.

The Beckley Foundation Drug Policy Programme was set up to cast light on the current dilemmas facing policymakers at national and international level, as they seek to improve the effectiveness of global drug policies. It produces quarterly reports and briefing papers on subjects relevant to international drug policy, and disseminates them to academics, practitioners and policymakers around the world. It promotes a balanced and evidence-based debate on issues surrounding drug use and misuse.

At this seminar, high-level participation from around the world, including representatives from the EU, UN and WHO, as well as from many national governments, academic institutions and NGOs, created the forum for an innovative debate. The gathering of so many professionals who share a commitment to the evidence-based development and refinement of policy in this field was unprecedented. Following the usual procedure of Chatham House Rules, the discussions were encouragingly open and unconstrained, despite the politically sensitive nature of the subject.

The timing of the seminar was particularly relevant given the imminent release of the new EU Drug Strategy (2005-2012). Following the seminar, two new initiatives, the Beckley Foundation *International Network for Drug Policy Analysis* and the *International Drug Policy Consortium* (of non-governmental organisations and professional networks), were launched.

The Beckley Foundation is grateful to the Earl of Dundee for the invitation to hold the seminar in the House of Lords. The magnificent Moses Room provided a beautiful setting for the event, a rare opportunity to hold a rational debate in a field often dominated by ideological and moralistic arguments. Jan Wiarda, Chairman of the European Chiefs of Police and Michael Portillo, formerly Secretary of State for Defence, chaired the morning and afternoon meetings excellently.

The seminar Proceedings document summarises the presentations and the discussions that followed. We thank all those who gave talks, participated in the discussions and helped organise this event.

Amanda Neidpath