

BECKLEY FOUNDATION
GLOBAL DRUG POLICY SEMINAR 2005
HOUSE OF LORDS, PALACE OF WESTMINSTER, LONDON

MAIN SEMINAR
MONDAY 21 NOVEMBER

INTRODUCTION BY AMANDA, LADY NEIDPATH

Hello, and welcome to you all, and thank you so much for coming from far and wide, to share your great expertise, on this extremely difficult, and very important area of social policy. With such an impressive gathering of distinguished speakers and participants, it promises to be a very interesting, and productive day.

I apologise for the last minute change of location, but from the Law Lords decision, there is no room for appeal.

From a more personal point of view, I thought a quote from Lord Layard was particularly appropriate: "THAT HAPPINESS SHOULD BE THE GOAL OF POLICY". If that is so, there is great room for improvement, in our current national and international drug policies.

There is much evidence that the War on Drugs has failed by its own criteria – drug use and drug markets continue to expand, as do the crime and health hazards associated with misuse and addiction.

I think it can be powerfully argued, that the desire to alter consciousness is an innate human drive – one only has to look at the popularity of alcohol, tobacco and caffeine.

If that is so, we need to direct our attention to how best to minimize the harms associated with this urge, while respecting the individual's right to make choices that do not harm others.

The aim of the Beckley Foundation seminars is to gather together great expertise in different fields, in order to consider how best to deal with the reality of a world awash with psychoactive substances.

This morning, we will be reviewing the effectiveness of current policies in achieving their stated aims, and how we might learn from their successes and failures.

This afternoon, we will be examining how international drug policies constrain scientific and medical research into controlled substances, and their effects.

I am delighted to introduce Ruth Runciman, who, as many of you know, chaired the committee which produced the seminal report, 'Drugs and the Law', so it is with great pleasure that I hand you over to her.