

Amanda Neidpath's Introduction to the presentation of the Cannabis Commission Report at UNGASS 2009 - Vienna

Many thanks for attending today's meeting. I am Amanda Feilding, Director of the Beckley Foundation. In 2006, I decided to convene the Global Cannabis Commission Report, as I was amazed that although cannabis is by far the most widely used illegal drug, with an estimated 166 million users worldwide, it was hardly mentioned in the international drug policy debates, I attended.

The aim of the Commission was to bring together the latest scientific evidence on all the important issues surrounding cannabis use and the policies that control it, which policy-makers need to know in order to make well-informed decisions. I was extremely fortunate to find five of the world's most respected drug-policy analysts to compile the report, of whom Robin Room and Peter Reuter are here today.

The overall objective of the report and its findings is to minimise the harms associated with cannabis, and to protect public health. It stems from the assertion, that: "That which is prohibited cannot easily be regulated."

To summarise, the report investigates and highlights:

- ⊙ The latest scientific evidence on the potential harms of cannabis use, both for the user and for society.
- ⊙ The social harms caused by cannabis prohibition.
- ⊙ The recognition that different policies whether draconian or liberal have little effect on the prevalence of drug use.
- ⊙ The need for a more rational, effective approach to cannabis control, including the identification and analysis of different possible routes

forward, from *depenalisation*, to *decriminalization* to *partial legality* and finally to a *regulated legal market*.

© The Report also highlights the different ways in which individual countries can seek to reform cannabis policies in order to better suit their individual needs. These include individual countries *denouncing the international conventions and re-acceding with a reservation on cannabis*, or a group of like-minded countries negotiating and adopting a new international convention specifically concerning cannabis. With this in mind we have produced a draft Convention on cannabis control based on the recent Tobacco Convention.

If a group of nations were to agree to reform the current out-dated and ineffective regime of cannabis control, then it could lead to the questioning of the whole 'War on Drugs' approach. Without cannabis within the system's remit, the proportion of illegal drug-users in the global population is around 1% – too small to justify the vast costs, both in financial terms and human suffering, that result from the current efforts to enforce the ideals behind this unwinnable war. With a much narrower target the 'War on Drugs' might turn instead into a more sensible campaign, to relieve the problems caused by the dependence of a small number of users on more addictive and dangerous drugs.

A great many policy-makers agree privately, if not publicly, that we have reached an impasse, a stalemate on cannabis control. This Report provides practical policy alternatives which could lead us towards a better future.

Thank you.