

Amanda Neidpath's Introduction for Peter Reuter and Robin Room

South America 2010

Thank you for inviting us to speak today. 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 195 million users worldwide, a figure that is considerably more than all other illegal drugs combined, it is hardly discussed at international drug policy debates. The Report has just been published as a book by Oxford University Press entitled Cannabis Policy: Moving Beyond Stalemate.

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 in order to enable policy-makers to make well-informed decisions. I was extremely fortunate to recruit 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 is to minimise the harms associated with cannabis and its prohibition. 50 years of prohibition have failed to meet their objective and have inflicted considerable social harms. These harms are particularly apparent in producer and transit countries, where the stability of the country itself can be threatened. The Report's key claim is: "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 as a whole.
- ⊙ The social harms caused by cannabis prohibition.

- ⊙ The fact that 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 fully *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 new 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, it could lead to the questioning of the whole 'War on Drugs' approach. Without cannabis within the systems remit the proportion of illegal drug-users in the world would total somewhere in the region of 40 million people - arguably 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 un-winnable 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.

Prohibitionist policies not only fail to meet their objectives but have inflicted significant social harms in the process. Whereas, with a regulated market the product could be labelled for strength and chemical composition, and its sale controlled and taxed taking money out of the hands of criminal drug cartels and putting it in the hands of the government thereby providing extra funding for education and treatment.

A great many policy-makers agree privately, if not publicly, that we have reached an impasse, a stalemate on cannabis control. In order to break this impasse which has lasted for more than fifty years, a more rational, scientific, and evidence-based approach to national and international drug policy is needed.

It gives me great pleasure to introduce two of the Authors the Global Cannabis Commission Report.

Professor **Peter Reuter** is from the School of Public Policy and the Department of Criminology at the University of Maryland; and has served as a consultant to numerous US, European, and UN agencies.

Professor **Robin Room**, a sociologist from the School of Population Health, University of Melbourne and is the director of the Centre for Alcohol Policy Research. He is also a professor at the Centre for Social Research on Alcohol and Drugs at Stockholm University.

Thank you.