



53rd Commission on Narcotic Drugs:

CONSENSUS ON PRIMARY PREVENTION, ARGUMENTS ON PALLIATIVE CARE AND NEO-DRUG COLONIALISM



53rd Session of CND has been an effective opportunity for governments and civil society sector to come together and discuss actualities and changes occurring in the drug policy field of the world. This year's session was all about **general consensus on the importance of universal prevention strategies, mass-media comprehensive campaigns and the latest INCB report of 2009 which underlined that primary prevention role had in many cases been underrated.**

The issue of palliative care and medical help for drug dependence

was emphasized in many presentations. Medical marijuana is an issue in 14 American states that has already resulted in numerous dispensaries distributing the drug for prescriptions.

UNODCP and its head Gil Kerlikowske stated that no legalization of this drug can be on US drug policy agenda, and referred to scientific research that by now is not evaluated yet.

Cannabis remains most abused narcotic substance in the world and it is vital that those who use it get regular expert advice not only on how the drug affects its users, but also how to give up on it. German Commissioner on drugs Mrs. Mechthild Dyckmans once again drew attention to the INCB report 2009, where the scientific growth of cannabis is referred to and said that the scientific validity of cannabis is now getting acknowledged.

Russian delegation emphasized the value of primary prevention and information, also monitoring of public opinion to evaluate the effects of state policy communication campaigns. To the question about eventual introduction of maintenance treatment programmes in Russia, the head of Russian Federal Drug Control Service Mr. V. Ivanov responded that present Russian legislation does not allow that.

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Afghanistan — FIRST in HASH and HEROIN PRODUCTION

Afghanistan, the world's biggest producer of opium, is also a major producer of cannabis. These are the findings of the Afghanistan Cannabis Survey, the first ever UNODC report on cannabis in Afghanistan, released at the end of March. The Survey estimates that between 10,000 and 24,000 ha of cannabis plant are grown in Afghanistan every year.

"While other countries have even larger cannabis cultivation, the astonishing yield of the Afghan cannabis crop (145kg/ha of hashish, the resin produced from cannabis, as compared to around 40 kg/ha in Morocco) makes Afghanistan the world's biggest producer of hashish, estimated at between 1,500 and 3,500 tons a year", said UNODC Executive Director Antonio Maria Costa.

The Survey is based on data from 1,634 villages in 20 provinces. It shows that there is large-scale cannabis plant cultivation in half (17 of 34) of Afghanistan's provinces.

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ORGANISED CRIME BEHIND EACH COFFEE-SHOP

"Oh, it is just hemp". The head of Dutch cannabis Task Force Max Daniel (53) has often heard this argument about cannabis being *"solely a light drug"*. Yet, *the weed-plant, once cherished in the windowsills by hippies, has lost its innocence a long time ago.*

"It is a battle against imagery. Where cocaine is concerned all alarm-bells start ringing. The trade in weed is considered of little importance. However, hemp is as much heavy criminality as cocaine," Daniel says at the brand-new chief office of the Frisian police in Leeuwarden.

In the past few years the Frisian commissioner has been the leader of the police and justice task force to fight organised hemp-growth based in Den Bosch. Within short he will stop and to become deputy chief of police in Friesland.

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★ ECAD REPORTS

INCB concerned over the medical use of drugs

In a press release 24 February 2010 INCB states that it is concerned over spread of "medical" cannabis.

In the United States, several states have enacted laws that provide for the purported "medical" use of cannabis. The control measures applied in those states fall short of the requirements of the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs.

INCB is deeply concerned that those insufficient control provisions have contributed substantially to the increase in illicit cultivation and abuse of cannabis in the United States. In addition, that development sends a wrong message to other countries, says INCB.

INCB appreciates that the Government of the United States has confirmed that it has no intention to legalize cannabis. INCB is, however, concerned over the ongoing discussion in several states in the United States on legalizing and taxing the "recreational" use of cannabis. This would be a serious contravention of the 1961 Convention, says INCB.

In its 2009 report, INCB emphasized that It is the responsibility of the Government of the United States to fully implement the provisions of the 1961 Convention with respect to all narcotic drugs, including cannabis. INCB pointed out that the obligations of the international drug control treaties are applicable in the entire territory of each State party, including its federated states and/or provinces.

Widely publicized health problems or even deaths of some well-known personalities have shed light on the increasing dimension of the abuse of pharmaceutical preparations containing substances under international control... The most frequently mentioned prescription opioids abused are buprenorphine, hydrocodone, oxycodone and methadone, but the problem is not limited to narcotic drugs. The abuse of benzodiazepines, alone or in combination with alcohol, is a problem, which remains largely unrecognized in many countries. The Board recommends that governments launch prevention programmes to make youth and families more aware of the dangers of abusing pharmaceutical preparations containing narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances.

Source: www.incb.org

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In general the vision of healthy lifestyle encompasses the health of each single person, said Russian delegate.

Annual CND session provides Vienna NGO Committee members to make their voice heard during informal dialogues with the heads of CND, INCB and UNODC. This session gathered 55 VNGOC member organizations and ECAD was one of those.

The most controversial of the informal meetings turned out to be the one with Executive Director of UNODC, Mr. A.M. Costa. This meeting with Vienna NGOs was his last one and Mr. Costa, who is bound to leave UNODC in a few months, shared his frustration over the spread of "neo drug-colonialism" in the developing countries. In his political statement Mr. Costa expressed discomfort with the present situation, because of the behavior of rich countries that seemed to be threatening the state of poor ones. He also urged to **look beyond the drugs issue and to mind the evolution of geo-politics in this respect, since ideological debate was not constructive.**

Mr. Costa **criticized the effects of palliative care, used today in many cases to produce morphine by the wealthy states, and called it a form of neo drug-colonialism.**

The blunt and emotional tone of this meeting was criticized by some NGOs (e.g. Transform Drug Policy Foundation), claiming Mr. Costa's own expressions were ideological and unbalanced. To that UNODC head reiterated that it was a universally accepted drug policy jargon he used and there was no doubt that he belonged to the anti-drug lobby wing, whose views were not liked by many.

The time line was pressing and the dialogue became rather short unfortunately, but in the end ECAD was among those organizations that appreciated Mr. Costa's candid attitude and efforts, and thanked the head of UNODC for the engagement he relentlessly demonstrated in drug policy matters.



Scary Scottish numbers

- **10** Babies a week born to **addict mums**
- **1%** of population use **heroin substitute**
- More than **half of the new addicts - heroin users**
- **3 247** abuse **diazepam**
- **3 051** use **cannabis**
- **1 231** use **cocaine**
- **526** are on **crack**

Shock new figures show **11,995 new patients were added to the Scottish Drugs Misuse Database.** And the cost of doling out methadone to addicts topped £16 million. Chemists handed out 493,770 prescriptions for the heroin substitute - now used by 1 per cent of the population.

The chilling stats were released as drugs expert Professor Neil McKeganey warned that **each addict costs Scotland £60,000 a year. That adds up to an annual bill of £3.5 billion.** And recently he insisted it's time to get addicts off all drugs - including methadone.

/By Andrew Nicoll, Scottish Political Reporter for The Scottish Sun

Organized crime behind each coffee-shop

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Head of the Dutch cannabis task force, Mr Max Daniel has been recently interviewed on the subject of organized crime in connection to cannabis growth. ECAD correspondents in the Netherlands, Jan Berlijn and Carla Maissan report exclusively for ECAD readers.

There is nothing soft about soft-drugs

The Netherlands are the largest producers of hemp in Western Europe. Roughly, it is a matter of at least of two milliard Euros. Yet there are also estimations up to five milliards. More than eighty percent finds its way abroad. However, any form of criminality has to do with cannabis.

"...Now there are white collar criminals that are only fixed on making profits. They don't care what the effects on the individual are. Hemp is cut up, just like cocaine and often blended with iron-filings, glass or sand. It does make a difference whether you deliver 400 kilos or 450 kilos. By cutting up your earn more and in doing so 50 times 3.500 euro's are added. This is easily earned."

Gradually cannabis has got interwoven with the whole of our society. "You may deal in hemp and be a town councillor in the Netherlands as well. If you dealt in cocaine the world would be too small", says Mr Daniel.

Max Daniel is willing to assume that a coffee shop-holder may be sound on this issue, but behind him there is always organised crime. Everybody wants to have a tiny share of that lucrative trade, both the underworld and the upper world. Nowhere are underworld and upper world so closely interwoven. Governments facilitate coffee shops. As a classic example of underworld and upper world being interwoven Daniel mentions the coffee shop Checkpoint in Terneuzen:

"It was the largest in the Netherlands with an annual turnover of thirty to thirty-four million euro's. Daily 10 to 15 kilos of cannabis were sold. Really you cannot fix this without organized crime!"

Trap of organised crime

"Many councils don't realise how easily they allow themselves to be dragged into the trap of organised crime". Daniel gives some exam-

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There is no form of threat and maltreatment that does not occur in the hemptrade, even shooting through kneecaps and cutting off fingers. Cutting of fingers is the classical solution in these circles. Just like you cut off the tops of the hemp-plant, in the same way the finger-tops of a suspected thief are cut off.

ples: "There are local coffee shops that sponsor football players at youth football clubs, or even a treatment centre for "hard" drug addicts".

There are gangs that don't produce themselves but steal the production of others. Cannabis plantations are overprotected, including installation of booby traps. Grow shops don't only supply informa-

tion and all requirements for the hemp growth, but also try to triple the income.



For quite a long time combating crime in connection to cannabis had not been a priority for the police and prosecution. Take, for in-

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We should start a debate about those who make money out of organised crime.

They are chartered accountants, banks, providers of filters, seed reservoirs, and manure for plant growing. There is nothing illegal about that. Even the treasury earns a good deal of money. We all think this is quite normal. Yet, is it quite normal?"

stance, agriculture and horticulture. Nowadays hemp is upgraded to such an extent that the percentage of THC, the active substance of weed, has become many times stronger.

Nowadays, weed has got a higher quality than the original hashish coming from Morocco or Afghanistan. "But," says Max Daniel, "this refinement takes place at a high, professional level, by industries connected with agricultural universities. Can you imagine that institutions would be working at the refinement of cocaine?"

The lawsuit against Checkpoint will function as an example. Whether this is a precedent case for the Department of Justice, Mr. Daniel could not say.

"At any rate this is a statement: it is not what coffee shops were meant to be, selling 97 cent of the turnover to foreigners today. It is a statement that we don't want this. The question is what do we want? The government wants smaller coffee shops, but how will they have to go about it?"

"Nowadays all the attention is directed to the future of coffee shops. Yet coffee shops constitute a small part of the problem, 80 percent of the hemp-growth goes abroad. Even if you close down all coffee shops, the other extreme, organised criminality, is hardly hit by this, since European trade pay three, four or five times more than the trade at coffee shops." / Translation Mrs. E.H. Foppen / Jan Berlijn / Carla Maissan

Lack of evidence for the effectiveness of sterile injecting equipment

NEW RESEARCH *Prior studies evaluating the effectiveness of needle/syringe exchange and related harm reduction programs to reduce disease transmission among injection drug users (IDUs) have produced only "tentative evidence" that these efforts prevent HIV transmission and "insufficient evidence" with regard to hepatitis C, according to a "review of reviews" published in the beginning of March in the online edition of the journal Addiction.*

The interventions assessed were needle and syringe programmes (NSP), alternative modes of needle/syringe provision (pharmacies, vending machines and outreach) and the provision of injecting equipment other than needles/syringes. Systematic searches of the English language literature to March 2007 were undertaken to identify systematic, narrative or meta-analytical reviews (also known as a review of reviews) of the impact of interventions on HCV transmission, HIV transmission or injecting risk behaviour (IRB). Critical appraisal criteria classified the reviews as either high quality ('core') or supplementary: a framework based on the quality of reviews, the reviewers' conclusions and the designs/findings of the primary studies was used to derive evidence statements.

Results

Three core and two supplementary reviews of injecting equipment interventions were identified. According to the proposed framework, this study found (a) insufficient evidence to conclude that any of the interventions are effective in preventing HCV transmission; (b) tentative evidence to support the effectiveness of NSP in preventing HIV transmission; (c) sufficient evidence to support the effectiveness of NSP (and tentative evidence of an additional impact of pharmacy NSP) in reducing self-reported IRB; and (d) little to no evidence on vending machines, outreach or providing other injecting equipment in relation to any of the outcomes.

Conclusions

The evidence is weaker than given credit for in the literature. The lack of evidence for effectiveness of NSP *vis-à-vis* biological outcomes (HCV and HIV incidence/prevalence) reflects the limitations of studies that have been undertaken to investigate these associations. Particularly for HCV, low levels of IRB may be insufficient to reduce high levels of transmission. New studies are required to identify the intervention coverage necessary to achieve sustained changes in blood-borne virus transmission.

/Source: www3.interscience.wiley.com By Norah Palmateer, Jo Kimber, Matthew Hickm, Sharon Hutchinson, Tim Rhodes and David Goldberg

Afghanistan — FIRST in HASH and HEROIN PRODUCTION

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The gross income gained per hectare of cannabis plant (US\$ 3,900) is higher than that of opium poppy (US\$ 3,600). Cannabis is also cheap to harvest and process: in Afghanistan, it is three times cheaper to cultivate a hectare of cannabis plant than a hectare of opium poppy. As a result, the net income of a hectare of cannabis plant is US\$ 3,341 compared to US\$ 2,005 per hectare of opium poppy.

The Survey shows that opium poppy is still favoured over cannabis plant among Afghan farmers: unlike opium poppy, cannabis plant has a short shelf life and grows in summer, when less water is available for irrigation. In the aggregate, the value of cannabis resin in Afghanistan was estimated at between US\$ 39 million and US\$ 94 million, about 10-20 per cent of the farm-gate value of opium (US \$438 million in 2009).

At a press conference in Kabul, UNODC Representative in Afghanistan, Jean-Luc Lemahieu, said "Alternatives are essential. Yesterday farmers' gained income from illicit crops. Tomorrow we must move them to licit livelihoods. Today is the challenge. Development will not come in a day, you cannot serve asphalt for dinner on the family table".

Staffan de Mistura, Special Representative of the Secretary General in Afghanistan also at the Kabul press conference stressed:

"When I meet with Afghans, they always mention two issues they are faced with: One is security, the other is corruption."

The UN is here to assist the government so that corruption is also tackled with the proper methods. It is in the interest of the international community as well as the Afghans. If corruption is not tackled, there is less incentive to give the resources so much needed for development."

Profits from the drug trade fuel corruption. It is no surprise that the anti-corruption drive goes hand in hand with the counter narcotics campaign.

Political leadership is required to deal with the illicit drug production in Afghanistan. "Afghanistan's drug problem is even more complex than just the opium trade", said Mr. Costa. "Yet the remedy remains the same. By improving governance and development in Afghanistan's drug-producing regions, we can knock out the world's biggest supplies of both hash and heroin", said Mr. Costa.

/Source: www.unodc.org



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Has your city joined ECAD?

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