



ECAD NEWSLETTER



EUROPEAN CITIES AGAINST DRUGS
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World Forum Against Drugs

Stockholm 8-10 September 2008



Over a thousand delegates are expected to participate in the World Forum Against Drugs (WFAD) which will take place in Stockholm on September 8-10 this year. Main theme for the conference is *One hundred years of drug prevention*. The Forum will gather under the patronage of H. M. Queen Silvia of Sweden.

The Forum creates an opportunity for popular movements from all around the world to express their support to the United Nations International Drug Conventions and to strengthen the restrictive drug policy.

- The time has come to raise people's resistance against all non-medical use of narcotic substances. It concerns future of our children, says Båb Bergvall, Chairman of the organising committee of WFAD, in an interview to the Swedish Drugnews.

During three days the participants will discuss topical drug-political issues within the frames of plenary sessions and numerous workshops. Myths about cannabis, human trafficking in light of drug trafficking, "drugs for war" – all of this is on the agenda. The Forum will consider latest findings in drug research and discuss effectiveness of different methods of treatment, prevention and enforcement. There will be time and place to discuss experiences of the host

country, Sweden. The successfulness of Swedish approach to curtail drug misuse is demonstrated by the fact that a comparatively low percentage of Swedish youth tries drugs.

- In a time when we mostly hear about the substitution treatment with methadone, subutex or whatever it might be, it is very important to call attention to the drug-free world. There are many addicts who, with the right help, manage to take themselves out of their addiction and stay absolutely drug-free, Båb Bergvall points out. The organisers invited representatives for American self-help movements and the Italian treatment community San Patrignano to tell about their experiences to rehabilitate and bring back into society former drug addicts.

Båb Bergvall is satisfied with a vast range of speakers who will come and talk at the Forum.

Among them – Director of ONDCP, psychiatrist from Peru, representatives for NGOs from Sri-Lanka and Thailand, Director of UNODC, professor in drug misuse research from Scotland, criminologist from Australia of Aboriginal origin, a nation which suffers from drug abuse.

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"Dare to be brave"

Tomas Hallberg has left ECAD to continue his career within IKEA in Russia. The *ECAD Newsletter* asked Tomas to look back at his time in the organisation.

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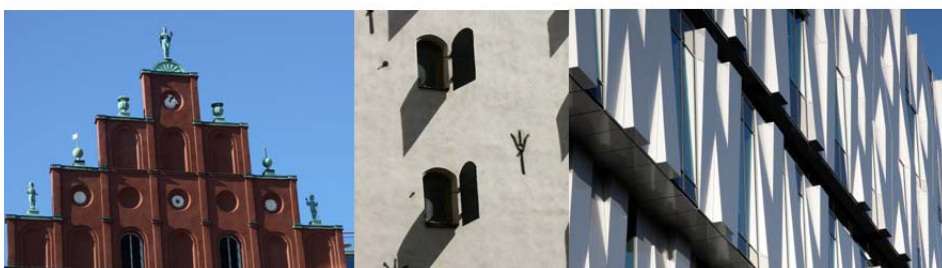
Editorial

Cannabis remains a subject for heated discussions in Great Britain. Last year, the *ECAD Newsletter* brought your attention to the sharp U-turn made by the British newspaper *Independent on Sunday*. Let me remind you that the newspaper publicly apologised for its long campaign for decriminalisation of cannabis. *Independent on Sunday* had – 'in the light of growing evidence' – acknowledged that a new tougher approach to this most popular drug among the British is needed. Last summer, the Home Secretary requested ACMD to re-

★ DISCUSSION

assess the classification of cannabis. Even before the official report was presented, it became clear that the government is determined to upgrade cannabis to Class B, regardless of whether this would gain support of ACMD or not. The story culminated on May 7 ...

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“Dare to be brave”

Interview with Tomas Hallberg, ECAD Director 1999-2008

EN: Tomas, you came to ECAD in 1999. What did the drug situation look like then compared to what it looks like now?

TH: Drug situation looks different in different countries. Sweden, for example, experienced a real shake-up in regard to drugs issues, with the help of ECAD's network and the National Drug Coordinator “Mobilisation Against Drugs”. The Baltic States improved their work against drugs by setting up regular drug enforcement. The same is true for Russia. Among those countries which did not have a positive development, rather the contrary, I would mention England, Scotland and North Ireland. There were no visible changes in Central Europe. Drug problems there remain at the same, rather high level.



Tomas Hallberg, ECAD Director 1999-2008

member cities and networks. If we could unite their efforts, there would absolutely be a possibility to counteract such a tendency.

EN: Tomas, what do you wish ECAD?

TH: I wish ECAD as they say in Russia every success and good luck. I hope that ECAD will be brave to defend the old. One needs to be brave to see that what was thought in 1993-19994 is valid in 2008-2009. Drug policy has historically followed swings of the pendulum. It has either been more restrictive or more liberal. Every time it was restrictive there was less problems. When it turned towards the liberal, then there were more problems. That is why one should dare to be brave to even up these swings and stand up for what one believes in.

EN: Thank you.

ECAD Advisory Board is in charge of the recruiting of a new director

EN: Does ECAD face new challenges today?

TH: I believe that the biggest challenge for ECAD as an organisation is to continue to play a prominent role on the international drug political scene. During these years ECAD succeeded to become a known actor. We should be content with the fact that we are respected by both the EU institutions and the UN bodies.

EN: What else does make you feel satisfied when you look back at the ECAD's development during your years as a director?

TH: I think that one of the most positive outcomes is the networking activities. There is a group of people gathered around ECAD as an organisation which is growing stronger. There are competent, well-functioning networks of cities in Sweden and Russia.

I am also satisfied with efforts that our organisation made in the field of education. I mean primarily in Russia, where ECAD played an important role in designing of an educational programme for drug coordinators. Our educational model was copied in Italy, which is very positive.

I believe that the so far largest ECAD programme *Youth in Europe* will become leading within its field in future.

I am proud that I helped to form and develop these initiatives.

EN: What is your biggest concern in regard to ECAD's future?

TH: What worries me most is huge resources which the pharmaceutical industry puts into medicalisation of the drug issue which I believe would be a big mistake. The drug issue is first of all a social problem that should be solved by social measures.

EN: Has ECAD competence to discuss such subjects and to counteract such tendencies?

TH: There are many knowledgeable people around ECAD, in our

World Forum...

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The Forum will conclude with passing of a resolution which will convey the strong popular support that exists all around the world for the UN Drug Conventions and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. These international treaties form a foundation of drug policies of the majority of states in the world. Nonetheless, the conventions are criticised by well-organised drug liberal movements which aim to weaken them with the motivation that the conventions are old and inefficient.

- By contrast, we think that these conventions helped to save many lives. That is why they need to be strengthened even more. We will send the Resolution adopted at the Forum to the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Drugs which will gather in Vienna in spring 2009, says Bob Bergvall.

Stockholm's Forum 2008 makes the start of a global network of organisations united behind the UN Drug Conventions. Eleven Swedish NGOs, initiators and organisers of this Forum, hope that the network will grow and its global meetings will become regular.

The three conference days promise to be intense. However, the World Forum is not only working. It creates great opportunities for rest and entertainment. It is rumoured that the participants will be invited to a rather unusual concert...

/Drugnews

Cannabis reclassification in Great Britain: pluses and minuses

In a statement to the British Parliament, the Home Secretary said she believed problems related to cannabis use are serious enough that it should be reclassified into Class B.

The decision reflects the fact that skunk, a much stronger version of the drug, now dominates the UK's cannabis market. Skunk swept other, less potent, forms of cannabis off the market, and now accounts for 81% of cannabis available on the streets, compared to just 30% in 2002. It's a drug that targets young people. The average age at which users first try skunk is 13, and young people may 'binge' on skunk in the same way as alcohol, trying to achieve the maximum effect. If they do, the independent Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs found that this can seriously impact their mental health.

If approved by Parliament, reclassification would take effect from early 2009.

Home Secretary Jacqui Smith said, 'Cannabis is and always has been illegal. It now dominates the illegal drugs market in the UK and is stronger than ever before.

'There is accumulating evidence, reflected in the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, showing that the use of stronger cannabis may increase the harm to mental health.

'I make no apology for erring on the side of caution and upgrading its classification. There is a compelling case to act now rather than risk the health of future generations.

'The enforcement response must reflect the danger that the drug poses to individuals, and, in turn, to communities. Those who are repeatedly caught with cannabis must face tough punishment, and that is why I have asked the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) to propose more robust enforcement measures to reflect reclassification.

'It is also important that the organised criminals behind the growing threat of cannabis farms feel the full force of the law, and that we use every opportunity and means to disrupt their activities so that the UK becomes a high risk place for them to operate.

'I also want to see more action against the trade in cannabis paraphernalia and will work with ACPO to look at how existing legislation and powers can be used by the police, local authorities and other partners to curtail the sale and promotion of these items.'

Read the Statement and Report from Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD) "Cannabis: Classification and Public Health" (2008) at <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk>

ACMD report

In its report, Cannabis: Classification And Public Health, the Advisory council described cannabis as a "significant public health issue". But it said it should still remain a class C drug, as the risks were not as serious as those of class B substances, such as amphetamines and barbiturates.

The report said the evidence suggested a "probable, but weak, causal link between psychotic illness, including schizophrenia, and cannabis use".

However, in the population as a whole, it played only a "modest role" in the development of these conditions.

The advisory council did not look at the message conveyed to the public or the impact on policing, which it is not legally obliged to do.

In its report the council called for a campaign to reduce the use of

cannabis, particularly focusing on young people.

It also voiced concern over the prevalence of domestic cannabis farms supplying the market and the involvement of organised criminal networks.

DISCUSSION

Prime Minister

Gordon Brown said at prime minister's questions that he believed making cannabis a class B drug was supported by the public and the police. Earlier in April he said he wanted to "send a message" to young people that using the substance was "unacceptable".

Police

Chief Constable Tim Hollis, a leader on drugs for the Association of Chief Police Officers, said he and his colleagues from other police forces would not want to take a uniform approach on the issue.

He said: "Our forces will want to retain discretion on how we deal with the problem because they will want to relate it to local circumstances."

Cannabis debate in British media

Several papers consider Gordon Brown's decision to return cannabis to classification as a class B drug after it was downgraded to class C four years ago.

For example, **The Daily Mail** is pleased with the move, calling it "brave and correct". But it is not impressed that the Association of Chief Police Officers intends to continue letting off with a warning people caught with small amounts:

ACPO, which represents senior officers across the country, stands by its recommendation that cannabis should be restored to Class B. A spokesman said: "Should the decision be taken to reclassify cannabis to Class B, we would expect to see increased robust enforcement activity, particularly in cases involving repeat offenders or where there are aggravating circumstances.

"However, as Simon Byrne, ACPO lead on policing cannabis and Assistant Chief Constable of Merseyside Police, made clear in evidence to the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs on February 5, 2008, we would seek to retain flexibility in dealing with instances of simple possession on the street, including the discretion to issue warnings."

The Observer remarks that

"Last year police warnings on cannabis rose 20 per cent to 120,000, suggesting the new approach is proving popular with officers on the streets, as it frees them from the bureaucracy associated with making arrests."

The **Observer** continues, "Something strange is happening on Britain's streets: drugs have become cheaper. A survey by the charity DrugScope, based on interviews with street dealers, reveals the price of a gram of heroin dropped from £46 in 2006 to £43 last year. An ecstasy pill cost £2.40 last year compared with £3 the year before.

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Cannabis debate in British media

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Ketamine and crystal powder also saw price falls while the price of cocaine remained stable. The price of cannabis, however, rose over the same period. While an ounce of 'normal' herbal cannabis would set you back £70 in 2006, last year it would cost you £87. And the price of an ounce of the stronger strains has risen to £134, up from £121.

Cannabis is now a big black-market business in Britain. While heroin is imported from the east, cocaine from South America and ecstasy from the Netherlands, much of the cannabis crop is homegrown. Sir Stephen Lander, the head of the Serious and Organised Crime Agency warned earlier this year that large-scale cannabis factories - producing high-strength strains of the drug and run by Vietnamese and Chinese criminals - are appearing across the country.

Charities working with immigrant communities claim that in many cases the factories rely on smuggled child labour to maintain the plants. What was a cottage industry has become an industrialised cultivation. Growers now use state-of-the art hydroponic systems to ensure bumper crops.

"The problem for the anti-cannabis camp, however, is that cases of psychosis have actually been falling. Research presented to the ACMD - and considered instrumental in persuading it that there is no need to reclassify cannabis - have shown incidents of schizophrenia have declined between 1996 and 2005.

And claims that Britain is in the grip of a cannabis epidemic also look flawed. According to government surveys, reported use of

cannabis among 11- to 15-year-olds dropped from 13.4 per cent in 2001 to 10.1 per cent last year. Over the same period, reported use of cannabis among 16- to 24-year-olds slid from 27.3 per cent to 20.9 per cent.

Significantly, the decline in reported cannabis use continued to fall after the drug was reclassified from class B to class C. 'The gentle decline is something we have seen in other countries, too,' said Ben Lynam, of the UKDPC. 'It's difficult to say what is driving this. It may be that people are switching to something else, like binge-drinking.'

Likewise, the number of children who believe it is 'OK' to do cannabis has dropped dramatically - from 17 per cent in 2003 to 9 per cent in 2006, according to the Department of Health."

DISCUSSION

The Magazine **Addiction today** operates with different statistics presenting information regarding mental illness and cannabis downgrade:

The number of people admitted to hospital with schizophrenia and psychosis has shot up since the laws on cannabis were relaxed in 2004, according to figures given to MPs [24 April] in advance of the publication of a report from the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs on whether cannabis should be again upgraded.

Cannabis was downgraded in January 2004. Admissions for patients with primary or secondary diagnoses of schizophrenia in England rose 12.7% since then to 45,955 people. Admissions for primary or secondary cases of psychosis rose 20.8% over the same period to

213,624 people.

The figures increased even more since Labour's David Blunkett first indicated in 2001 that cannabis would be reduced from a class B to C drug. The increase in schizophrenia admissions since then is 24%, in psychosis 42%.

Ineffectiveness of Needle Exchange Programs

In five cities with long-established needle exchange programs - Baltimore, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York and Seattle - addicts still shared needles, even those addicts with HIV. Of the 3,129 individuals studied, 45.8 percent gave a dirty needle to another user, and 41.7 percent self-injected with a used needle from another addict. What is the original source of these needles? 61.9 percent reported receiving their syringes from the needle exchange program or pharmacy. The authors suggest that since needle exchanges have not demonstrated an effect on the behaviour or health of injection drug users, perhaps the social norms of drug-using behaviour should be addressed.

/The Drug Free America report

NEW MEMBERS

ECAD welcomes three Swedish cities!

Hallsberg
Lekeberg
Lerum



Our European societies have experimented and evaluated both tolerance and intolerance to illicit drug use and drug abuse. It is our reflection upon this which guides us towards non-use. This in regard to our communities' well-being.



ECAD is Europe's leading organization promoting a drug free Europe and representing millions of European citizens. ECAD member cities work to develop initiatives against drug abuse supporting the United Nations Conventions.
Has your city joined ECAD?

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