

DEVELOPING THE ISSDP AND THE IDPC

One of the emergent themes of the Beckley Foundation's seminar series is that, despite a growing weight of evidence highlighting the inadequacy of current drug regulations, efforts to reform drug policy are hampered by a lack of co-ordination amongst those individuals and organisations advocating for both more scientific evaluation of drug policy and the implementation of a more evidence-based drug policy. At the 2004 Beckley Foundation Drug Policy Seminar therefore, the directors of the Beckley Foundation Drug Policy Programme (BFDPP), Amanda Neidpath and Mike Trace, held initial meetings to discuss the establishment of two networks, one of policy-analysts and academics and the other of NGOs working in the drug policy field. The outcome of these meetings was very positive and resulted in the formation of:

- An informal network of senior academics from around the world, active in the field of evaluating and analysing the effectiveness of drug policies. Prof. Peter Reuter was asked to chair this organisation, which he kindly accepted.
- A consortium of many of the NGOs working around the world in the drug policy field, to be chaired by Mike Trace. It was agreed that members of this consortium would work together to promote evidence-based drug policies to governments and international agencies.

To build on these promising foundations, the third day of the 2005 seminar was dedicated to concurrent meetings to formalise and promote the way in which the society and the consortium would build their identities, expand their networks and formulate how they would function. These meetings also provided an opportunity for participants to present some of their work, discuss the most pressing areas for future research, and establish how these organisations could most effectively pursue their aims. As outlined in the updates below, these fledgling organisations, initially founded as part of the Beckley Foundation, have now developed into highly respected independent international networks, whose advice is sought by national and international governments alike on all areas relating to drug policy.

INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF DRUG POLICY (ISSDP)

This meeting of the International Network of Drug Policy Analysts, convened by the Beckley Foundation as part of the 2005 seminar, was attended by many of the leading drug policy analysts from around the world. The day started with a series of presentations on some of the key policy questions that had been identified as needing further research and analysis if policymakers were to have useful guidelines for effective policy. These presentations were used as the basis for network members and invited guests to discuss a forward program of research that would provide the necessary answers to these policy questions. At the end of the day, discussions were held on how to develop the network, what its goals should be, and how its findings should be

presented and distributed. During this discussion, it was decided to retain the original aims, members and Peter Reuter as its chair, but to rename the organization the *International Society for the Study of Drug Policy* (ISSDP) and that it would be better if the organization was seen to be independent from the Beckley Foundation. It was also agreed that the ISSDP, together with the Beckley Foundation, would continue working on the development of an online bibliography to help analysts locate recent policy-relevant articles and reports, and keep abreast of the fast expanding and cross-cutting literature on various aspects of drug policy.

The aims of the ISSDP are therefore to:

- Develop relations among leading analysts and thus strengthen the field.
- Be a forum for high quality drug policy analysis.
- Develop the scientific base for policy decisions.
- Improve the interface between researchers and policy makers.

Since the 2005 seminar, the ISSDP held its first independent meeting in Oslo in March 2007, and has now established a formal structure through which academics can discuss potential collaborative work and present their findings. The network is to hold a symposium each year to provide a platform for the best and most recent research and analysis in the field. The 2008 Symposium is scheduled for April in Lisbon. The ISSDP also administers an online bibliography that provides members and other academics with easy access to all published research on particular drug policy topics. This service is available on the ISSDP website: www.issdp.org, as well as the Beckley Foundation website: www.beckleyfoundation.org.

The ISSDP Coordinating Committee is chaired by Professor Peter Reuter of the University of Maryland, USA. Its Vice-President is Alison Ritter, Associate Professor at the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, Australia. The other Committee members are Henri Bergeron (Senior Research Fellow at The French National Centre for Scientific Research), Sandeep Chawla (Head of Research and Policy Analysis at the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime), Christine Godfrey (Professor of Health Economics at the Department of Health Sciences and Centre for Health Economics at the University of York, UK), Keith Humphreys (Associate Professor of Psychiatry at Stanford University and a Career Research Scientist in the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs), and Pia Rosenqvist (Head of the Nordic Centre for Drug and Alcohol Research)

ISSDP members are regular contributors to the Beckley Foundation reports and seminars on drug policy. Through their diligent and careful research and analysis, the ISSDP complements the Beckley Foundation and its goal of promoting evidence-based drugs policy that seeks to minimize the harms associated with the use and misuse of drugs.

INTERNATIONAL DRUG POLICY CONSORTIUM (IDPC)

By the time of the 2005 seminar, the IDPC had been in existence for almost a year, and had already been involved with specific projects for the UN and EU, as well as providing advice on drug policy issues to the Governments of Ireland, Portugal and Russia. As the scope of this consortium expanded, it became clear that, in order to maximize the efficacy with which the consortium worked, it was necessary to hold a meeting to discuss a more formal structure and operating system. This was achieved through the meeting at the Beckley Foundation Seminar of 2005, which formalized the IDPC as a credible, global NGO network that would engage constructively with governments by providing policy-makers with a 'critical friend' analysis, and realistic proposals of how dilemmas in drug policy and programme formulation could be resolved.

The early experience of the IDPC has been encouraging, with politicians and officials keen to engage with the consortium, particularly when it was able to offer access to expertise the policy-makers did not have. Less than three years on, this network has become the most respected source of independent strategic advice to governments on national and international drug policy. It currently has 26 members incorporating a wide range of expertise and consisting of NGOs and professional networks that cover 7 continents. Its stated aims are to promote objective and open debate on the effectiveness, direction and content of drug policies at national and international level, and to promote the adoption of evidence-based policies that are effective in reducing drug-related harm. Based on the findings of its members' research and publications, amongst other sources, the Consortium engages with officials and politicians in national governments and international agencies to help promote effective policies - through correspondence, face-to-face meetings and involvement in conferences and seminars. It thereby makes available to policy makers the most up-to-date research and practical knowledge.

Over the course of 2008/9, the IDPC will be particularly focused on the United Nations 10-year review of global drug policy (UNGASS), which will conclude with a high-level political meeting in Vienna in 2009. The IDPC will be producing and distributing a series of key documents that incorporate constructive recommendations for a positive outcome from this review. The Consortium has also taken on a coordinating role in which information about the progress and content of the review is collated and disseminated to all interested parties around the world through its 'Advocacy Guide'. The latest version of this guide, together with all other reports of the IDPC and a list of its constituent members, can be downloaded from its website – www.idpc.info, and is also accessible via the Beckley Foundation's website: www.beckleyfoundation.org.