



## BECKLEY FOUNDATION

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GLOBAL COMMISSION ON DRUG POLICY

*“Drug policies must be based on solid, empirical, and scientific evidence. It is not a policy we can nourish with moralistic, idealistic points of view. We have to know what the consequences of drug problems and drug policies are.”*

**Summary:** Ruth Dreifuss explained the origins, aims, and principles of the Global Commission on Drug Policy, and gave a detailed, evidence-based assessment of the effects of current drug policies on society. She then summarised the Global Commission’s conclusions and recommendations.

### PRINCIPLES OF THE GLOBAL COMMISSION ON DRUG POLICY

The Global Commission on Drug Policy grew out of a gathering of Latin American leaders, writers, and cultural leaders, who had assembled to discuss the war on drugs, the threat to democracy, and the situation in Latin America. Building on this successful experience, nineteen globally engaged individuals came together to form the Global Commission on Drug Policy.

The Commission is united by four principles, stating that **drug policies must be:**

1. Based on human rights, public health, and the need for public safety and security.
2. A shared responsibility worldwide. With growing problems in producer, transit, and consumer countries, we must face problems together – but in broad view, not just the perceived view expressed by the UN Conventions.
3. Comprehensive and consistent, nationally and internationally. It is very important to bring together all national branches (e.g., health and law enforcement), but above all, to give more consistency to international drug policy.
4. Based on solid, empirical, scientific evidence, rather than moralistic or idealistic points of view.

### ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT DRUG POLICIES BASED ON THE EVIDENCE

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In the 50 years since the 1961 International Convention, drug use has increased in all segments of the population. This has benefitted organised crime, while the negative effects on our society are undeniable: mass imprisonment, vast drug control costs, and a negative impact on social and economic development, including the destruction of culture (particularly in producer countries, where repressive politics encourage poverty and marginalisation and negatively impact social integration.) The focus needs to be on the link between poverty and drug consumption.

In the 1980s and 90s we also faced the health consequences of drug consumption, i.e., the HIV/AIDS pandemic. One of the main sources of infection was intravenous drug consumption. In order to control the pandemic, we had to focus on drug policy.

Finally, there are human rights problems: Violations of drug laws carry the death penalty (sometimes compulsory) in most countries still practicing execution. Human rights are also infringed upon in the 'treatment' offered to people, such as forced labour or harsh punishment.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE GLOBAL COMMISSION**

1. We must give priority to a public health approach. Treatment options for drug addiction must be expanded, and we must acknowledge the importance of harm reduction. We need to encourage those at risk to seek help in order to protect themselves and their environment, and we have to focus on prevention services.
2. It is of the utmost importance to end the criminalisation and punishment of consumers. Harsh penalties are disproportionate, and they are obstacles to a public health approach and to an open discussion with people at risk. Criminalisation is expensive and counterproductive. It marginalises poor communities, encourages human rights abuse, feeds courts and prisons, and undermines public health.
3. It is vital to rethink law enforcement and the way its success is measured in order to minimise collateral damage. It is necessary to measure success not by the number of arrests or seizures made, but by real indicators that show whether we are approaching our aim, which is the reduction of violence, organised crime, and corruption of the state.
4. We need a regulated market for drugs. There are more tools at hand to manage drug use and problems if we regulate rather than repress the market. We encourage national experimentation; let us make experiments, monitor them, publish the results, and change accordingly to find a better solution.
5. It is crucial to take human rights seriously. We cannot criminalise 250 million drug consumers in the world. They do not forfeit their human rights because they are consuming drugs. They have the right to privacy; the right against invasive enforcement and compulsory treatment; the right to health; the right to due process. And there are also indigenous and cultural rights. We have to preserve ancient practices and ceremonies without criminalising them.

The Global Commission on Drug Policy represents a call for the leadership to take responsibility and to open the debate, to break the taboo, and to try to find solutions in a shared effort to have better drug policies in our world.

