

COLORADO CONSEQUENCES

A Statement By The International Task Force on Strategic Drug Policy
January 2014

The primary duty of any Government is to ensure the welfare and well being of its citizens which is why most countries signed up in support of and compliance with International Drug Control Treaties. The UN Conventions were developed because it was universally agreed that control was necessary to protect the health and welfare of mankind; they are reviewed and approved every decade. The main Convention of 1961 is very flexible in its approach and far from being all about arrests and imprisonment, it emphasises the need that *drugs should be used only for legitimate medical and research purposes*. It stresses health and requires that all drug dependent people are treated with respect and not marginalised or discriminated against. The Conventions encourage evidence based therapy for those who become dependent as well as education, rehabilitation and social re-integration. Criminality also has to be addressed.

The purpose of any effective drug policy should be to lessen the societal harms of illegal drugs. Lowering or eliminating current legal and social restrictions that limit the availability and acceptance of drug use will likely have the opposite effect. Any Government policy must be motivated by the consideration that it must first do no harm. There is an obligation to protect citizens and the compassionate and sensible method must be to do everything possible to reduce use, dependency and misuse; not to encourage or facilitate it.

What has happened in Colorado is the exact opposite of what the UN Conventions set out to achieve. The remarkable thing is that it remains illegal to grow, sell or use marijuana under U.S. Federal law which classifies the drug as a controlled substance. Thus it is incredible that there have been no overt moves by the Attorney General and no widely publicised criticism of these developments by the U.S. President to quash a State decision

There is little doubt that there will be enormous pressure for others to follow Colorado and great rejoicing amongst those who have already seen this as an opportunity to make billions of dollars, and those in favour of legalising all drugs. Undoubtedly, universal resistance to legalisation has suffered an enormous blow and the credibility of law enforcement agencies will suffer whilst the burden on health and social services will increase enormously.

Sadly, there is another UN Convention which has been ignored, namely that concerned with the Rights of the Child, 1989, designed to protect children from the illicit use of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances and to prevent the use of children in illicit production and trafficking. Although the United States never ratified this Convention, it voted for it and actually has tougher laws on this topic which have been enacted by its Congress. This is important as the human brain does not stop developing until well into the twenties and substances like marijuana are proven to damage the brain permanently.

No matter the half hearted attempt by proponents in Colorado to protect people under the age of 21 by prohibiting sales to them, it is naivety in the extreme to pretend that children will remain unaffected by this marijuana free-for-all. There will be aggressive marketing, which

has already begun, and this will persuade many to sample the drug. Based on the parallel with tobacco there will be an almost guaranteed long term uptake of 50%. Permissibility, availability and accessibility of dangerous drugs will likely result in increased consumption by many who otherwise would not consider using them. The example of adults freely indulging in the use of this drug will certainly influence children who will come to believe that because its recreational use has been permitted then it cannot be very dangerous and many will try the drug in the same way that they use tobacco and alcohol.

Criminals will continue to facilitate the use of all other dangerous drugs. The plant remains a dangerous drug the use of which has scientifically proven and seriously damaging consequences, particularly for young and impressionable youth. Freedom of choice does not bring freedom from adverse consequences.

Apart from all of the overwhelming evidence of harm that is caused by the use of marijuana there is a significant difference from the use of alcohol which is that marijuana is fat soluble and remains in the body for many days after initial ingestion. If this is on a regular basis the adverse effects are cumulative and the user is never free from the drug, whereas alcohol is water soluble and a unit is broken down by the liver within the hour. In the case of the use of tobacco, the carcinogenic effects of marijuana are significantly greater and more seriously damaging. It is certain that people driving under the influence of drugs will increase. Does society really want its airline pilots, taxi drivers, educationists and medical professionals for example to become regular recreational users of marijuana?

It is folly to believe that the inevitable increase of the use of marijuana that will follow from this unwise move in Colorado, Washington and all of the other States that will be tempted to follow suit will not place a great burden on society. Those who see Colorado as a good example are no doubt dazzled by the illusion of untold wealth that allegedly will be used for the benefit of society rather than the financial entrepreneurs whose only motive is profit. Public health will be seriously damaged, children will suffer a great loss of potential and the ultimate beneficiaries will be unscrupulous business people and criminals. A "Big Marijuana" industry will develop that will dwarf the "Big Tobacco" industry but will do far more damage. Society as a whole will be the worse for this foolish ignoring of scientific and medical evidence.

Prohibition has ensured that the total number of users is low because legal sanctions do influence people's behaviour. The cumulative effects of prohibition and interdiction combined with education and treatment during 100 years of international drug control have had a significant impact in stemming a major drug problem. Control is working and one can only imagine how much worse the problem will become if others follow the bad example of Colorado.

The ***International Task Force on Strategic Drug Policy*** is a network of professionals and community leaders from over 35 countries who support and promote drug demand reduction principles, develop community coalitions and strive to advance communication and cooperation among non-governmental organizations who are working to stem illicit drugs and promote sound drug policy around the world.