

## **UNODC World Drug Report 2006 full of scientific insults**

In its 2006 World Drug Report, released today, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) struggles to fabricate success stories about the effectiveness of the global drug control regime. Flawed comparisons are constructed with higher opium production levels a century ago, with higher prevalence figures for tobacco, and biased claims are made about cannabis. Martin Jelsma, coordinator of the Transnational Institute's Drugs & Democracy Programme, after a quick read of the report today, considers it to be "full of scientific insults".

TNI is an international research institute with a decade long history of being a watchdog of UN drug control agencies. Tom Blickman, a researcher of the programme, adds: "if UNODC was a commercial company with stockholders, it could be sued for fraud for conscious distortion of the future prospects of its enterprise."

"Humanity has entered the 21st century with much lower levels of drug cultivation and drug addiction than 100 years earlier," the report claims. This '100-year success' story, however, cannot be attributed to the multilateral drug control regime. It was related to specific developments in China and to new pharmaceutical products replacing the medicinal uses of opium.

Another questionable claim of success in the World Drug Report is the comparison with tobacco. "To argue that it is thanks to the drug control system that the use of illegal drugs has not spiralled out of control to similar massive prevalence levels as tobacco has no scientific basis whatsoever", according to Martin Jelsma.

'Containment' – a term used in the report – fits reality better and that recognition should lead to emphasize policy measures that reduce the harms of current levels of drugs consumption. Unfortunately, says Martin Jelsma, "harm reduction policy developments are nowhere to be found. This means that the real existing success stories from the past decade, such as reduced numbers of overdose deaths and lower rates of HIV transmission due to harm reduction efforts, are left out completely".

UNODC Executive Director, Antonio Maria Costa claims that the world is experiencing a devastating "cannabis pandemic". His strong language is at odds with other sections of the report that recognize that "much of the early material on cannabis is now considered inaccurate, and that a series of studies in a range of countries have exonerated cannabis of many of the charges levelled against it."

"The report is biased and unbalanced. The use of inconclusive scientific evidence to demonise cannabis is identical to the preceding mistake that resulted in scheduling cannabis at the same level as cocaine and heroin" according to Tom Blickman. "The report suffers from the tension between UNODC policy makers who want a strict control regime maintained – and who are under huge US funding pressure – and the experts willing to open an honest debate about the effectiveness of outdated aspects of the current policy framework," he says.

With a view to the upcoming 10-year evaluation of the 1998 UNGASS, if anything, the 2006 World Drug Report shows that a genuine evaluation process is needed more than ever and that the UNODC cannot be relied upon to perform that task in a transparent, objective and balanced way, without the help of independent experts.

**For more information see:** *International drug control: 100 years of success? TNI comments on the UNODC World Drug Report 2006*, TNI Drug Policy Briefing nr. 18 at :  
<http://www.tni.org/policybriefings/brief18.pdf>

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