



THE BECKLEY FOUNDATION

PRESS RELEASE

CANNABIS Policy: Moving Beyond Stalemate

On Thursday, 2nd October 2008, the Beckley Foundation will launch its **Global Cannabis Commission Report**, an authoritative guide to the effects of cannabis, the policies that control its use, and recommendations for policy reform.

Despite cannabis being the most widely used illegal drug, with more than 160 million users worldwide, and therefore being the mainstay of the War on Drugs, it has only held a relatively marginal position in international drug policy discussions. In recognition of this, Amanda Feilding, Director of the Beckley Foundation decided to convene a team of the world's leading drug policy analysts to prepare an overview of the latest scientific evidence surrounding cannabis and the policies that control its use.

The **Beckley Foundation is a UN-accredited NGO** and this **Report** has been prepared for the **United Nations' Strategic Drug Policy Review of 2009**. The **Report** will provide policy-makers at national and international level with all the relevant facts to help them make better informed decisions.

In reviewing the evidence, the authors come to some striking conclusions, many of which challenge the received wisdom concerning cannabis:

- Although cannabis can have a negative impact on health, including mental health, in terms of relative harms it is considerably less harmful than alcohol or tobacco. Historically there have only been 2 deaths worldwide attributed to cannabis, whereas alcohol and tobacco together are responsible for over 100,000 deaths per annum in the UK alone.
- Many of the harms associated with cannabis use are the result of prohibition itself, particularly the social harms arising from arrest and imprisonment.
- Policies that control cannabis, whether draconian or liberal, appear to have little impact on the prevalence of consumption.

- In an alternative system of regulated availability, market controls such as taxation, minimum age requirements for use and purchase, labelling and potency limits are available to minimise the harms associated with cannabis use.

These conclusions present a stark challenge to policymakers by presenting them with the evidence that the current system of cannabis regulation is not working, and that there needs to be a serious rethink if we are to minimise the harms caused by cannabis use. For example, it is only through a regulated market that we can better protect young people from the ever more potent forms of cannabis, known as 'skunk'.

The **Report**, with its *Conclusions and Recommendations*, will form a blueprint for nations seeking to develop a more rational and effective approach to the control of cannabis. Moreover, in making recommendations for the reform of cannabis laws at the international level, this **Report** sets out a means for allowing countries greater autonomy in setting their own cannabis policies, which better reflect their own individual circumstances.

The **Report** is being launched at a seminar at the House of Lords on 2nd October 2008. A press conference will take place in the Moses Room at the Palace of Westminster on Thursday, 2nd October at 1:00pm. PLEASE NOTE: Members of the press wishing to attend will need a letter of invitation from The Beckley Foundation to clear security at the Palace of Westminster. Deadline for this request is 12:00 (noon) Wednesday, October 1.

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