

PRESS RELEASE

**MYANMAR ON ITS WAY TO A MORE HUMAN RIGHTS AND HEALTH
CENTERED DRUG POLICY**

Under embargo until 8th of April

(Yangon, 8th of April 2017)

The Drug Policy Advocacy Group – Myanmar (DPAG) and the Global Commission on Drug Policy (GCDP) will organise an important public event on Drug Policy on the 8th of April 2017. The event, the first of its kind to be held in Myanmar, will gather a large audience from Civil Society Organisations, local and international NGOs, UN Agencies, representatives from the drug users and opium farmers communities, political parties, Government Officials and media.

Madam Ruth Dreifuss, Chair of the Global Commission on Drug Policy and former President of Switzerland, will speak as a special guest speaker, together with other local prominent panelists. She will present the recent report of the Global Commission, *Advancing Drug Policy Reform: a new approach to drug decriminalization*, which details the destructive and harmful consequences of punitive drug policies.

Last month, a draft bill proposing amendments to Myanmar “Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Law” was published in newspapers for public consultation. The draft Law notably foresees that drug users will no longer be punished with lengthy prison penalties, and will instead be offered treatment and rehabilitation.

Dr Nang Pann Ei Kham, from the Drug Policy Advocacy Group – Myanmar (DPAG), which co-organises the event and also released a report last February - *Addressing drug problems in Myanmar: 5 key interventions that can make a difference* - expressed her hope that the country’s current repressive approach will be replaced with drug policies based on human rights, public health and sustainable development:

“We warmly welcome the Government’s intention to end the criminalisation of drug use. It is a necessary step. But to be successful, it will be equally vital to ensure that health and social interventions for drug users are truly voluntary and evidence-based. In fact, the use of compulsory drug treatment and rehabilitation, so common in Southeast Asia, is fundamentally incompatible with public health.”

A view shared by Madam Ruth Dreifuss, who added: “Drug policy reform that is respectful of human rights can contribute to the encouraging transition that Myanmar is making towards democracy. It would be a missed opportunity for the country to simply shift from a criminal justice response to another repressive model forcing people into treatment, in the guise of public health.”

The two above-mentioned reports will be available both in English and Burmese versions at the event.

“On this visit, I hope to contribute, by sharing my experiences and those of my colleagues at the Global Commission, to the current debate on defining appropriate drug policies that are adapted to the particular environment and needs of Myanmar,” concluded Madam Dreifuss.

For a copy of Global Commission's 2016 report on decriminalization (in nine languages) and access to the media kit, please access:

<http://www.globalcommissionondrugs.org/reports/advancing-drug-policy-reform/>

For a copy of Drug Policy Advocacy Group - Myanmar report on how to address drug problems in Myanmar, please access:

<https://www.tni.org/en/publication/addressing-drug-problems-in-myanmar>

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For further information, please contact:

Nang Pann Ei Kham
Coordinator – Drug Policy Advocacy Group - Myanmar
+95 (0)9 799 852 080
coord.dpag@gmail.com

Eric Grant
Communications Officer – Global Commission on Drug Policy
+41 79 124 1523
eric.grant@globalcommissionondrugs.org

Note to the Press

The Drug Policy Advocacy Group – Myanmar (DPAG) is a discussion platform composed of a wide range of stakeholders with an interest in drug related policies and practices in Myanmar. Members include representatives from the drug users' and opium farmers' communities, civil society organisations, international and national NGOs: National Drug Users Network Myanmar (NDNM), Myanmar Opium Farmers Forum (MOFF), Myanmar Anti-Narcotics Association (MANA), Médecins du Monde (MdM), Save the Children, Population Services International (PSI), HIV/AIDS Alliance and Transnational Institute (TNI).

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Drug-Policy-Advocacy-Group-Myanmar-995656970513733/>

The Global Commission on Drug Policy was established in 2011 by political leaders, cultural figures, and globally influential personalities from the financial and business sectors. The Commission currently comprises twenty-four members, including ten former Heads of States or Government and a former Secretary General of the United Nations. Its mission is to promote evidence-based drug policy reforms at international, national and regional levels. These reforms must address issues of public health, social integration and security, with strict regard for human rights.

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