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UNODC rewrites history in new World Drug Report to hide failure

The new UN World Drug Report is an elaborate exercise of obscuring the failure of ten years of international drug control policy, according to the Transnational Institute (TNI). TNI is one of the leading non-governmental research institutes on drugs policy.

In spite of claims made in the report released today, the world is not any closer to achieving the 10-year targets set by the 1998 UN General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on drugs. These goals were “eliminating or significantly reducing the illicit cultivation of coca bush, the cannabis plant and the opium poppy by the year 2008.”

Instead global production of opium and cocaine has significantly increased over the last ten years. According to UNODC's own figures global illicit opium production doubled in the last ten years and cocaine production increased by 20%.

“There is overwhelming evidence that the current approach to drug control has failed”, says Martin Jelsma, coordinator of the TNI Drugs & Democracy Programme. “Instead of setting unrealistic targets, we need to introduce a more rational, pragmatic and humane approach to the drugs phenomenon.”

In an attempt to draw attention away from this clear failure, the report reviews 100 years of history, claiming success in comparison with Chinese opium production and use in the early 20th century. *“The UNODC is trying to hide failures behind a bad history lesson”, says Jelsma. “The report not only tries to rewrite history, it is also out of touch with today’s dramatic consequences of drug policies”.*

TNI’s research shows that the World Drug Report:

- Deliberately overestimates opium abuse in China in the early 20th century. Opium use in China was mostly moderate and relatively non-problematic, often for medicinal use.
- Wrongly attributes reductions in global opium production to the international drug control system.
- Mentions unintended consequences that have resulted from international drug control policies, but ignores the fact that to improve access to medicines, respect human rights, avoid militarisation and reduce current rates of imprisonment, fundamental changes in the treaty system are necessary.

On the positive side, the report concludes that the international control system needs to be refined and made ‘fit for purpose’, focusing on crime prevention, harm reduction, and human rights. *“The report contains many useful data and ends with meaningful proposals,”* says Jelsma.

“Drug control policies should be based on evidence, fully respect human rights and take a harm reduction approach”, says Jelsma. *“Otherwise we will see another ten years of failure.”*

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See also TNI’s website www.ungassondrugs.org launched to coincide with the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND)’s meeting in Vienna to review UN General Assembly Special Session on drugs.