

Taking Control: Pathways to Drug Policies that Work

FOREWORD FROM THE CHAIR

Fernando Henrique Cardoso

The international drug control regime is broken. In our 2011 report we called on global leaders to join an open conversation on drug policy reform. We recommended that they immediately discuss alternatives to the failed war on drugs. In subsequent reports we drew their attention to the urgent need for reform to reduce the devastating epidemics of HIV and Hepatitis C. We asked policy makers to break the fifty year taboo on talking about more effective and humane ways to manage drugs.

Today, three years later, we are pleased to see that a genuine debate on new approaches to drug policy is underway in an array of national and regional forums. Crucially, the discussion is based on evidence, and new, exciting innovations are spreading across the Americas, Africa, Europe, South and South East Asia, and Australia and the South Pacific. The discussion is truly global, and governments and civil societies are learning from one another, and testing out new approaches on the ground.

The reality in 2014 is that governments and civil societies are not only talking, many are taking action. Drug policy reform has begun to move from the realm of theory to practice. Courageous leaders from across the spectrum are seeing the many political, social and economic dividends from drug policy reform. They recognize the critical mass of voices demanding a new course. And recognizing that change is inevitable, they are beginning to experiment with a range of solutions drawing from solid data and with an open mind. Informed approaches are trumping ideological ones and the results are encouraging.

In this report, we set out a broad roadmap for getting drugs under control. We recognize that past approaches premised on a punitive law enforcement paradigm have failed, emphatically so. They have resulted in more violence, larger prison populations, and the erosion of governance around the world. The health harms associated with drug use have got worse, not better. The Global Commission on Drug Policy instead advocates for an approach to drug policy that puts public health, community safety, human rights, and development at the center.

We need to be bold but pragmatic. There is no one-size-fits-all way to enacting drug policy reform. We recognize that the shift will demand changes in domestic and international policy and practice. It will entail trial and error and an honest and critical engagement with results. But we are encouraged by the many signposts that are emerging that can help governments and citizens take the right steps forward. They have momentum on their side, and can gather insights from the many positive developments around the world that have occurred since 2011.

What is now needed is action by the world's multilateral institutions, first of all the United Nations (UN). We are delighted to see the quality of high level debate being generated from heads of state and senior UN figures. It is also encouraging to see important regional organizations contributing to positive reform. Reports supporting change from the Organization of American States, the West Africa Commission on Drugs, and the Global Commission on HIV and the Law, are all critical building blocks of drug policies that work. They are also openly challenging the international drug control regime and creating political space for new players to explore similar approaches.

We are driven by a sense of urgency. There is a widespread acknowledgment that the current system is not working, but also recognition that change is both necessary and achievable. We are convinced that the 2016 United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) is an historic opportunity to discuss the shortcomings of the drug control regime, identify workable alternatives and align the debate with ongoing debates on the post-2015 development agenda and human rights. The Global Commission encourages all UN member states and agencies to continue rethinking the question of drug policy reform. We encourage leaders to seriously engage with new challenges, not least new synthetic drugs appearing on the market almost daily, which demand more creative responses.

The global debate has moved forward in a positive direction, accepting that drug policy needs to be based on public health, community safety, human rights and development. With this report we ask leaders around the world to translate rhetoric into concrete action. A stale political declaration in 2016 that promises to 'solve the drugs problem' and make the world 'drug-free' is not going to be the answer the world needs. We reiterate that the international community needs to come to terms with the reality that easy answers to solve the drug problem do not exist. Our report does not offer the definitive solution. Rather, it provides a roadmap for pragmatic policy change we think will make the drug-related problems the world faces today, much more manageable. We ask that countries take advantage of the 2016 UNGASS as an opportunity to finally start getting drugs under control.