



**GLOBAL
COMMISSION ON
DRUG POLICY**

PO BOX 1672 | 1211 Geneva 1 | Switzerland
+41 22 908 43 75
secretariat@globalcommissionondrugs.org
www.globalcommissionondrugs.org

PRESS RELEASE

GLOBAL LEADERS ADDRESS THE WORLD DRUG
PERCEPTION PROBLEM IN A NEW REPORT BY THE GLOBAL
COMMISSION ON DRUG POLICY



(London, 10 January 2018)

The new report by the Global Commission on Drug Policy, *The world drug PERCEPTION problem – Countering prejudices about people who use drugs*, focuses on how current perceptions of drugs and people who use them have led to an unrealistic and stigmatizing, rather than pragmatic and evidence-based approach to drug policy.

The report was launched on Tuesday 9 January at a public event at Chatham House, London, and presented by Commissioners from around the globe: **Helen Clark**, former Prime Minister of New Zealand and Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); **Sir Nick Clegg**, former UK Deputy Prime Minister, UK; **Ruth Dreifuss**, former President of Switzerland and Chair of the Global Commission; **Asma Jahangir**, former UN Special Rapporteur on Arbitrary, Extrajudicial and Summary Executions, Pakistan; **Michel Kazatchkine**, former Executive Director of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, France; and **Olusegun Obasanjo**, former President of Nigeria.

Sir Nick said, “Current drug policies are all too often based on perceptions and passionate beliefs, not facts. Any drug use carries risks, but only a small number of people who use drugs go on to face addiction or dependency. Those who do develop problems need our help, not the threat of criminal punishment.”

With this report, the Global Commission confronts common perceptions and fears about drugs that form the background to repressive policies. In particular, it reviews the universal impulse behind the consumption of psychoactive substances, counters the negative portrayals of people who use drugs, and opposes the dominating narratives of crime and inevitable addiction that exist in many political discourses, in the media, and among the general public.

“The national and international classification of drugs has little or no correlation to their scientifically-assessed harms, yet it has played a large role in shaping current perceptions of drugs and their potential dangers,” said Helen Clark. “For example, while heroin currently poses the greatest risk to the individual taking it, when considering the harms to society as a whole, alcohol turns out to be the more harmful drug.”

The Global Commission urges leaders to provide reliable and consistent information, and review the evidence for more effective policies. It encourages all citizens to take part in the debate, sustain activism and advocacy, and keep governments, parliaments, the police and the judiciary, the media, and healthcare and social professionals accountable.

Ruth Dreifuss said, “We need to end the stigmatization of people who use drugs, as this leads to discrimination and supports repressive drugs laws based on moral judgment. Whether you think of someone and refer to them as a person who uses drugs or a “junkie” makes a huge difference in how you and society will treat them. This vicious cycle, which has been fueled for decades, must be broken. Opinion leaders should live up to their responsibility in shaping public perceptions on drugs, promoting non-discriminatory language, and respecting the full rights of all citizens.”

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For further information, please contact:

Eric Grant

Communications Officer

+41 79 124 1523

eric.grant@globalcommissionondrugs.org

About the Global Commission on Drug Policy

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 25 members, including 12 former Heads of States or Government, a former Secretary General of the United Nations and three Nobel Prize laureates. Its mission is to promote evidence-based drug policy reforms at international, national and regional levels. These reforms must promote public health, social integration and safety goals, with a strict regard for human rights.

The Global Commission on Drug Policy has issued six reports, beginning in 2011 with [*War on Drugs*](#), which details the extent of the failure and damage of five decades of prohibition and punitive measures. In 2014, [*Taking Control: Pathways to Drug Policies that Work*](#) emphasized public health approaches, alternatives to incarceration, and decriminalization, as well as calling for the legal regulation of psychoactive substances. In 2016, [*Advancing Drug Policy Reform: a new approach to decriminalization*](#), examined in more depth the benefits of decriminalization and called for an end to all civil and criminal penalties for drug consumption and possession for personal use. Three other reports by the Global Commission on Drug Policy are more focused on how prohibitive drug control negatively impacts public health issues: HIV/AIDS ([*How the Criminalization of Drug Use Fuels the Global Pandemic*](#), 2012), Hepatitis C ([*The Hidden Hepatitis C Epidemic*](#), 2013) and creates barriers for access to essential medicines for pain and palliative care in countries around the world where they are desperately needed ([*The Global Crisis of Avoidable Pain*](#), 2015).

In October 2017, the Global Commission released a [*Position Paper on the Opioid Crisis in North America*](#), offering recommendations on how to mitigate the unprecedented overdose epidemic in the US and Canada.

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Other quotes from members of the Global Commission on Drug Policy:

"In Switzerland's direct democracy, drug policy reform promoting a health-centered approach focused on harm reduction and treatment, has repeatedly triumphed at the ballot box. This is in large part because the public was well informed of the facts and positive outcomes."

- **Ruth Dreifuss**, Former President of Switzerland, Chair of the Global Commission on Drug Policy

"A kind of circular logic exists in Nigeria, where many people claim that drugs will drive people to insanity, while at the same believing that drugs are only taken by the insane. But people who use drugs are the real victims of the drug trade. They need support and understanding."

- **Olusegun Obasanjo**, former President of Nigeria, Chair of the West Africa Commission on Drugs

"The prejudices faced by people who used drugs and the criminalization of their drug use are a violation of their citizens' rights. In order to change how people who use drugs are treated, we need to change how we speak about them and how we consider their use in a comprehensive manner, including all social and economic determinants linked to it."

- **José Ramos-Horta**, former President of Timor-Leste and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate
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“‘Addiction’ remains extremely stigmatized in health care settings. Language matters. Research has shown that even trained mental health practitioners treat differently cases where patients are referred to as ‘substance abusers’ than those alluded to as ‘people with a substance use problem’”.

- **Michel Kazatchkine**, Professor of Medicine, former Executive Director of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria