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THE DRUGS ZONE: Human  
Reduction and Drug Law

# THE VIENNA DECLARATION

Leading the way to illicit drug policies based on evidence, not ideology



“As things now stand, governments across the world continue to incarcerate drug users, and the cycle of stigma, HIV infection, and mass inequity goes on. The end result is a global HIV epidemic among drug users that is spiraling out of control.”

Stephen Lewis  
Former UN Special Envoy  
for HIV/AIDS in Africa

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**Support Drug Policy  
Based On Science,  
Not Ideology.**

# THE VIENNA DECLARATION

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## What is the Vienna Declaration?

The Vienna Declaration is a scientific statement that seeks to improve community health and safety by calling for evidence-based drug policies. It was drafted by a writing committee of international experts in the fields of HIV/AIDS and drug policy, under the leadership of the International AIDS Society, the British Columbia Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS, and the International Centre for Science in Drug Policy.

The Vienna Declaration was adopted as the Official Declaration of the XVIII International AIDS Conference, held in Vienna from July 18 to 23, 2010. This is the largest biennial public health conference in the world, attracting about 20,000 delegates internationally. The 2010 conference

was convened by the International AIDS Society along with various international conference partners, including the World Health



Organization (WHO), the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the European Commission.

## Why Do We Need the Vienna Declaration?

*We are currently at a critical juncture in drug policy.*

Research shows that the criminalization of illicit drug users continues to fuel a massive, global HIV epidemic and has resulted in overwhelmingly negative health and social consequences. Outside of sub-Saharan Africa, 1 in 3 new HIV cases occurs in intravenous drug users, and in some areas of Eastern Europe, HIV prevalence may be as high as 70% among people who inject drugs.<sup>1</sup> Drug-related crime, violence and corruption have destabilized entire countries such as Mexico, Columbia and Afghanistan.<sup>2-4</sup> Since 2006, in Mexico alone, nearly 29,000 people have been killed in drug-related violence in the past four years.<sup>5</sup> The Vienna

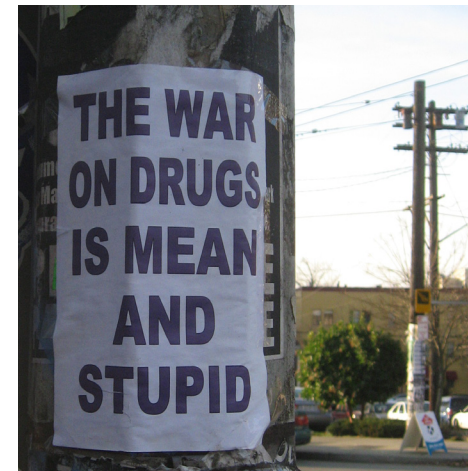
Declaration was adopted as the Official Declaration of the XVIII International AIDS Conference, held in Vienna from July 18 to 23, 2010. This is the largest biennial public health conference in the world, attracting about 20,000 delegates internationally. The 2010 conference was convened by the International AIDS Society along with various international conference partners, including the World Health Organization (WHO), the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the European Commission.

*The human and economic costs of the status quo can no longer be tolerated.*

Governments and taxpayers are increasingly bearing the financial burden of failed drug policies that emphasize incarceration over health-based approaches. In the United States, about \$2.5 trillion

has been spent on drug control efforts since the start of the “War on Drugs” in the 1960s.<sup>6</sup> Currently, one out of every 100 Americans is behind bars on a drug-related criminal conviction.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the best efforts of the “War on Drugs,” international surveillance systems have shown that drug purity has increased, drug prices have decreased, and drug use has remained largely unchanged since the 1980s.<sup>8</sup> The “War on Drugs” approach also diverts law enforcement attention away from areas where it could meaningfully improve community safety. The Vienna Declaration highlights the failure of current drug policies and calls for the development of new policies based on scientific evidence.



# THE VIENNA DECLARATION

**The criminalisation of illicit drug users is fuelling the HIV epidemic and has resulted in overwhelmingly negative health and social consequences. A full policy reorientation is needed.**

In response to the health and social harms of illegal drugs, a large international drug prohibition regime has been developed under the umbrella of the United Nations.<sup>1</sup> Decades of research provide a comprehensive assessment of the impacts of the global “War on Drugs” and, in the wake of the XVIII International AIDS Conference in Vienna, Austria, the international scientific community calls for an acknowledgement of the limits and harms of drug prohibition, and for drug policy reform to remove barriers to effective HIV prevention, treatment and care.

The evidence that law enforcement has failed to prevent the availability of illegal drugs, in communities where there is demand, is now unambiguous.<sup>2,3</sup> Over the last several decades, national and international drug surveillance systems have demonstrated a general pattern of falling drug prices and increasing drug purity—despite massive investments in drug law enforcement.<sup>3,4</sup>

Furthermore, there is no evidence that increasing the ferocity of law enforcement meaningfully reduces the prevalence of drug use.<sup>5</sup> The data also clearly demonstrate that the number of countries in which people inject illegal drugs is growing, with women and children becoming increasingly affected.<sup>6</sup> Outside of sub-Saharan Africa, injection drug use accounts for approximately one in three new cases of HIV.<sup>7,8</sup> In some areas where HIV is spreading most rapidly, such as Eastern Europe and Central Asia, HIV prevalence can be as high as 70% among people who inject drugs, and in some areas more than 80% of all HIV cases are among this group.<sup>8</sup>

In the context of overwhelming evidence that drug law enforcement has failed to achieve its stated objectives, it is important that its harmful consequences be acknowledged and addressed. These consequences include but are not limited to:

- HIV epidemics fuelled by the criminalisation of people who use illicit drugs and by prohibitions

on the provision of sterile needles and opioid substitution treatment.<sup>9,10</sup>

- HIV outbreaks among incarcerated and institutionalised drug users as a result of punitive laws and policies and a lack of HIV prevention services in these settings.<sup>11-13</sup>
- The undermining of public health systems when law enforcement drives drug users away from prevention and care services and into environments where the risk of infectious disease transmission (e.g., HIV, hepatitis C & B, and tuberculosis) and other harms is increased.<sup>14-16</sup>
- A crisis in criminal justice systems as a result of record incarceration rates in a number of nations.<sup>17,18</sup> This has negatively affected the social functioning of entire communities. While racial disparities in incarceration rates for drug offences are evident in countries all over the world, the impact has been particularly severe in the US, where approximately one in nine African-American males in the age group 20 to 34 is incarcerated on any given day, primarily as a result of drug law enforcement.<sup>19</sup>
- Stigma towards people who use illicit drugs, which reinforces the political popularity of criminalising drug users and undermines HIV prevention and other health promotion efforts.<sup>20,21</sup>
- Severe human rights violations, including torture, forced labour, inhuman and degrading treatment, and execution of drug offenders in a number of countries.<sup>22,23</sup>
- A massive illicit market worth an estimated annual value of US\$320 billion.<sup>4</sup> These profits remain entirely outside the control of government. They fuel crime, violence and corruption in countless urban communities and have destabilised entire countries, such as Colombia, Mexico and Afghanistan.<sup>4</sup>

- Billions of tax dollars wasted on a “War on Drugs” approach to drug control that does not achieve its stated objectives and, instead, directly or indirectly contributes to the above harms.<sup>24</sup>

Unfortunately, evidence of the failure of drug prohibition to achieve its stated goals, as well as the severe negative consequences of these policies, is often denied by those with vested interests in maintaining the status quo.<sup>25</sup> This has created confusion among the public and has cost countless lives. Governments and international organisations have ethical and legal obligations to respond to this crisis and must seek to enact alternative evidence-based strategies that can effectively reduce the harms of drugs without creating harms of their own. We, the undersigned, call on governments and international organisations, including the United Nations, to:

- Undertake a transparent review of the effectiveness of current drug policies.
- Implement and evaluate a science-based public health approach to address the individual and community harms stemming from illicit drug use.

- Decriminalise drug users, scale up evidence-based drug dependence treatment options and abolish ineffective compulsory drug treatment centres that violate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.<sup>26</sup>

- Unequivocally endorse and scale up funding for the implementation of the comprehensive package of HIV interventions spelled out in the WHO, UNODC and UNAIDS Target Setting Guide.<sup>27</sup>

- Meaningfully involve members of the affected community in developing, monitoring and implementing services and policies that affect their lives.

Basing drug policies on scientific evidence will not eliminate drug use or the problems stemming from drug injecting. However, reorienting drug policies towards evidence-based approaches that respect, protect and fulfil human rights has the potential to reduce harms deriving from current policies and would allow for the redirection of the vast financial resources towards where they are needed most: implementing and evaluating evidence-based prevention, regulatory, treatment and harm reduction interventions.

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## Writing Committee

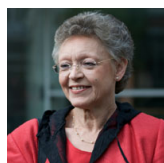
The Vienna Declaration was drafted by a team of international experts in the field of HIV and drug policy. Key authors include:



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Associate Professor, University of British Columbia  
Canada



## Endorsements

During the first two months following its launch, more than 17,000 individuals and more than 400 organizations from every region of the globe endorsed the Vienna Declaration. Among the signatories to date are seven Nobel laureates, thousands of scientific and academic experts, a diversity of health, faith-based, and civil society organizations, law enforcement leaders, and the judiciary from countries around the world.

### Key individual endorsements include:

- Prof. Françoise Barre-Sinoussi, Nobel laureate, co-discoverer of HIV in 2008
- Paulo Coehlo, author
- Sir Ian Gilmore, Past President of the Royal College of Physicians of London
- Anand Grover, UN Special Rapporteur
- Michel D. Kazatchkine, Executive Director of The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria
- Sir Harold Kroto and Robert F. Curl, Jr., Nobel laureates in Chemistry, 1999
- Stephen Lewis, former UN Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa

“The Vienna Declaration is an opportunity to show governments that we are speaking with a voice that spans continents, cultures and languages to send a simple message: We demand drug policies that respect human rights and are based on scientific evidence.”

Anya Sarang  
President, Andrey Rylkov Foundation

- Tom Lloyd, former UK Police Chief
- Dr. Julio Montaner, Past President of the International AIDS Society
- James Orbinski, Nobel laureate, who accepted as President of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) in 1999
- Vernon L. Smith, Nobel laureate in Economics, 2002
- Norm Stamper, retired Seattle Police Chief
- Jack W. Szostak, Nobel laureate in Physiology/Medicine, 2009
- Mario Vargas Llosa, author and Nobel laureate



Stephen Lewis, UN Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa, 2001-2006

### Key organizational endorsements include:

- AIDES France
- AIDS Foundation East-West
- Andrey Rylkov Foundation for Health and Social Justice
- ANITEA
- Australian Federation of AIDS Organizations
- Austrian AIDS Society
- Beijing Aizhixing Institute
- Canadian Public Health Association
- Canadian Association of HIV Research
- Drug Policy Alliance
- Eurasian Harm Reduction Network





- European AIDS Treatment Group
- Foundation for AIDS Research (amfAR)
- Fundación Huesped
- German Society of Addiction Medicine
- HIV Medicine Association of India
- HIV Medicine Association of the United States
- Human Rights Watch
- International Association of Physicians in AIDS Care
- International Federation of Health and Human Rights Organizations
- International HIV/AIDS Alliance
- Law Enforcement Against Prohibition (LEAP)
- New York Academy of Medicine
- Viva Rio

## Political Support

### Former Latin American Presidents

In addition to support from academics, civil society organizations and the general public, there is growing international political support for the Vienna Declaration. Three former Latin American Presidents—**Fernando Henrique Cardoso** (former President of Brazil), **Ernesto Zedillo** (former President of México) and **César Gaviria** (former President of Colombia)—have all formally endorsed the Vienna Declaration, urging alternatives to the “War on Drugs” given the devastation this war has caused in Latin America.

“Current drug policies are repressive and firmly rooted in prejudices, fears and ideology. The way forward is clear: to safeguard human rights, security and health, please join me in signing the Vienna Declaration.”

Fernando Henrique Cardoso  
President of Brazil, 1995–2003

### Leaders from the Country of Georgia

Three leaders from the country of Georgia—First Lady **Sandra Roelofs**, Minister of Labour, Health and Social Affairs **Irakli Giorgobiani**, and Deputy Chairman of Parliament **George Tsereteli**—have also demonstrated their support for evidence-based drug policy by signing the Vienna Declaration.

“Georgia supports evidence-based policy in our efforts to protect community health and safety. Our signatures on the Vienna Declaration reinforce our recognition that harm reduction can provide numerous benefits and highlights the need to design policies that align with emerging science.”

First Lady Sandra Roelofs  
Wife of Mikheil Saakashvili, President of Georgia

### The Cities of Toronto, Victoria and Vancouver, Canada and the Mayor of Prague, Czech Republic

The impacts of drug prohibition are felt first-hand at the local level. The City of Toronto, Canada was the first municipality to formally endorse the Vienna Declaration. Victoria and Vancouver, Canada and the Mayor of Prague, Czech Republic have also endorsed the Declaration.

“In Toronto, we are committed to a balanced response to drug use that focuses tax resources on measures that can meaningfully improve community health and safety.”



David Miller  
Mayor of Toronto, 2003–2010

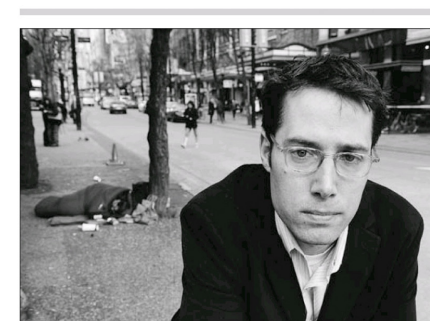
“The Vienna Declaration is a powerful statement in support of an effective public health approach to illicit drug policy. We’re signing this declaration because we believe that drug addiction needs to be treated as a health issue, not a criminal issue.”



Gregor Robertson  
Mayor of Vancouver

## Media Coverage

The Vienna Declaration has received extensive media coverage. More than 200 articles have been written about the Declaration by media outlets around the world, including leading newspapers such as the *New York Times*, the *Guardian*, *El Pais*, the *Globe and Mail*, the *LA Times*, and the *Wall Street Journal*.



Dr. Evan Wood, founder of the Centre for Science in Drug Policy, says it is time to stop treating drug use as a criminal problem when it can be dealt with more effectively as a health issue.

### HEALTH

## Governments urged to end ideological war on drugs

Report blames prohibition for violence and spread of disease

BY TODD COVNE  
VANCOUVER STAR

Two Vancouver-based health policy groups have partnered with the International AIDS Society to release a report today calling on the world’s governments and policy-makers to abandon the criminalization of drug use.

The report, entitled the Vienna Declaration, argues that criminalizing drug users spreads violence and infectious diseases like HIV/AIDS.

The BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS and the International Centre for Sci-

ence said the paper urges political leaders to put ideology aside and treat drug use as a public health crisis rather than a law enforcement issue.

“It makes the case quite forcefully that not only has drug-law enforcement failed to achieve its stated objectives in terms of reducing drug supply ... but there is also a range of unintended consequences,” said Wood. “If you look at countries that rely more on law enforcement to deal with drugs, you also see higher HIV rates among drug users.

Wood said HIV rates increase as intravenous drug users are forced into the

“legalization,” they advocate regulation of the drug trade and the decriminalization of the drug user, he said.

“I don’t think your average person knows that marijuana is more accessible to young people than alcohol,” said Wood, noting that Portugal has the lowest rate of marijuana use of all European Union countries after decriminalizing all drug use in 2001.

“Maybe all this emphasis on law enforcement just serves to glamorize these drugs ... but, if we deal with this as a health issue, like we have with alcohol and tobacco, maybe we can have an impact on this problem.”

## Portugal’s experience points to drug solution

IT WORKS: Political will needed but Tories going other way



Ethan Baron  
INSIDE EDGE

It has become clear that arresting, prosecuting and jailing heroin and crack addicts doesn’t make them stop using drugs. The illegal drug trade continues to fuel crime and gang violence, and the social and health effects of addiction push the cost to \$8.2 billion a year across Canada, according to a 2007 report by the Health Officers Council of B.C.

Until now, debate over the issue has tended toward the extremes: legalize drugs or impose harsher penalties. Both solutions are misguided, and the polarized controversy has obscured the middle ground, where lie the best solutions.

Two Vancouver-based organizations — the B.C. Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS and the International Centre for Science and Drug Policy (ICSDP) — have played a key role in drafting a declaration advocating the worldwide decriminalization of drugs.

The “Vienna Declaration” is the manifesto for next month’s 2010 International AIDS Conference in Vienna. University of B.C. associate professor and ICSDP founder Evan Wood chaired the writing committee.

“There is no evidence that increasing the ferocity of law enforcement meaningfully reduces the prevalence of drug use,” the declaration says.

“Billions of tax dollars [are] wasted on a ‘war on drugs’ approach to drug control that does not achieve its stated objectives.”

Wood often refers to the results Portugal achieved by decrimi-

nalizing all drugs — including heroin and cocaine — in 2001. And a 2009 Cato Institute report on Portugal’s experience shows that dealing with drug use as a health and social issue, rather than as a crime, produces surprising results.

Before Portugal decriminalized drugs, opponents of the plan predicted vast increases in drug abuse and warned the country would attract hordes of drug tourists.

None of the nightmare scenarios ... has occurred,” says the Cato report by Glenn Greenwald. “While drug addiction, usage, and associated pathologies continue to skyrocket in many EU states, those problems — in virtually every relevant category — have been either contained or measurably improved within Portugal since 2001.”

In Portugal, it’s still against the law to possess or use illicit drugs. Drug trafficking is still a criminal offence. What’s changed is the response when people are caught for using or possessing a 10-day supply of drugs or less.

There are no criminal charges, just a citation and a summons

to a three-member “dissuasion commission” composed of officials with expertise in the law, health and social services.

Commission members hear the circumstances of the person and their drug offence and determine whether the person is an addict. Fines can be issued or fines can be waived, conditional upon the person entering a treatment program.

Public money saved by decriminalizing drugs has been diverted into drug treatment, the Cato report says.

“Treatment programs — both in terms of funding levels and the willingness of the population to seek them — have improved substantially.”

As well, the number of addicts newly infected with HIV has dropped steadily since 2001.

Here in B.C., the political will to create more addiction-treatment space falls far behind the need and our drug-related costs — financial and human — continue out of control.

Decriminalization would free up millions of dollars for an expanded treatment system and prevention programs. Unfortunately, the legal changes are required at the federal level, where the Stephen Harper government is going in the opposite direction.

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**What do you think?**

Comment on this story online at [theprovince.com](http://theprovince.com) or email us at [provletters@theprovince.com](mailto:provletters@theprovince.com).

## End the war on drugs, say AIDS campaigners

“Scientists appeal for signatures to the Vienna Declaration to press for changes in drug policy and de-criminalisation of injectors, which they say will slow the spread of HIV.”

The Guardian  
June 29, 2010

### Toronto formally endorses harm reduction on drug use

“Toronto has become the first city in the world—and the first government in North America—to formally endorse a declaration that advocates harm reduction over the war on drugs.”

*Globe and Mail*,  
August 26, 2010

### Drug law enforcement has entirely failed

“Aids experts from around the world are calling for governments to adapt their law enforcement policies to help prevent the spread of HIV among drug users. Dr Evan Wood, founder of the International Centre for Science in Drug Policy, explains why he is calling for a ‘dramatic reform of drug policy’.

*BBC*  
July 19, 2010

### Drug war statement upstaged at AIDS gathering

“The one exception to the official American silence was Dr. Nora D. Volkow, the normally low-profile director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse, who said she personally agreed with the declaration’s premise.”

*New York Times*  
July 23, 2010

### A failed “War on Drugs” prompts rethinking on HIV infections among injection-drug users

“Drug policy has focused on a policing approach of prohibition and incarceration, which has contributed to spreading HIV within the injection-drug community. Comprehensive drug reform policies are showing better results.”

*Scientific American*  
August 25, 2010

## Next Steps

Clearly, the current policy approach has failed, and we must find a better way to deal with illicit drug use that improves community health and safety and minimizes health and social harms rather than creating them. To date,

As laid out in the Vienna Declaration, there are public health models in many countries that demonstrate alternative policy approaches that can be highly effective in improving community health and safety. Therefore, in the

“In my experience, drug addiction is not a path that people willingly choose. Those who suffer from addiction need and deserve access to services that can keep them and their loved ones safe and point them in the direction of recovery. Let’s stop this ideological war that cannot be won. Let’s instead adopt strategies that research has proven to be effective, that come without dire unintended consequences.”

Norm Stamper, PhD  
Seattle Chief of Police (Ret.)

however, policy makers have been slow to move away from strict drug law enforcement policies. In Russia, 1 in 100 adults is now infected with HIV, largely because the country is focused on a futile war on drugs. Moving forward will require that politicians and other leaders consider these harms and boldly agree that drug policies should be based on evidence. Signing the Vienna Declaration is a key way to make this statement.

coming years, the Declaration will continue to gather support for:

- Scaling up proven evidence-based prevention, treatment, and harm reduction strategies
- Further evaluation of the impacts of drug policies and research in the area of illicit drug policy
- Expanded knowledge related to illicit drug policy so that public policy can be fully informed by the best available evidence.

## Building Towards AIDS 2012

With strong support for the Declaration in only the first months after its launch, momentum is already building towards the next



International AIDS Conference, which will be held in Washington, DC in July 2012. In advance of this, endorsements are being sought so that a strong message will be sent to the international community that drug policy must be based on science and evidence—not ideology.

Here is what you can do to support the Vienna Declaration in the lead-up to the AIDS 2012 Conference:

### 1. Sign the Declaration

Everyone who supports evidence-based drug policies is encouraged to sign the Declaration. Anyone who represents an organization and is entitled to do so is encouraged to obtain the endorsement of the group and to sign the Declaration on its behalf.

### 2. Encourage others to sign the Declaration

Everyone is asked to spread the word to others about why and how they can support evidence-based drug policies. Urge your friends, colleagues and others to sign the Declaration.

### 3. Ask your local government representatives to endorse the Declaration

If you are a concerned citizen and want your elected representatives to know that you support the call for evidence-based drug policies, encourage them to formally endorse the Vienna Declaration. If you are interested in asking your local government to support the Vienna Declaration, please let us know at [info@icsdp.org](mailto:info@icsdp.org).

[www.viennadeclaration.com](http://www.viennadeclaration.com)

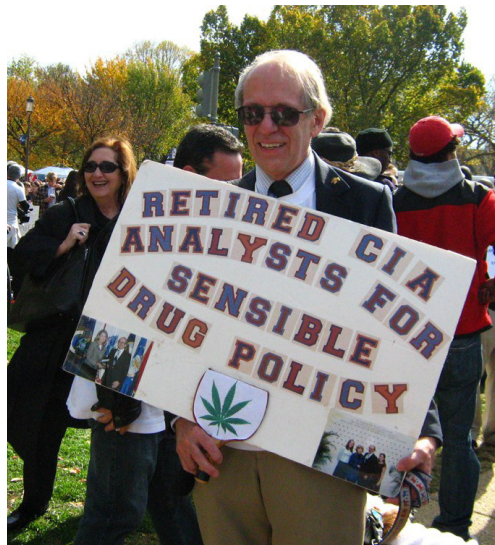


### 4. If you are an elected official, bring the Vienna Declaration to your government for endorsement

With political support for the Declaration gaining momentum, it is critical that elected officials continue to take a leadership role and demonstrate their support for scientifically grounded, evidence-based drug policies by passing a motion or resolution officially endorsing the Declaration. If you are an elected official or policy maker interested in bringing the Vienna Declaration forward to your local or state government, please contact us at [info@icsdp.org](mailto:info@icsdp.org) for assistance or more information.

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