



SCIENTISTS DEMAND A NEW APPROACH TO EVALUATING ILLICIT DRUG POLICY

Leading international researchers call on governments to evaluate illicit drug policies by prioritizing indicators that measure their 'real world' impact on communities

Toronto, Canada – Scientific experts from around the world are calling on governments to better align illicit drug policy goals with community concerns. According to an [open letter](#) released by the International Centre for Science in Drug Policy (ICSDP), while governments measure illicit drug policies primarily based on their capacity to reduce the availability of illicit drugs, this ignores the ‘real world’ impact of drug policies on the health, security, development, and human rights of affected communities. This call comes as the international community focuses unprecedented attention towards the world drug problem.

In advance of the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Drugs (UNGASS) – the largest international meeting on drug policy since 1998 – leading researchers are asking national governments and UN agencies to commit to revising the indicators currently used to evaluate drug control policies. Scientists held a [panel to release the open letter](#) at the United Nations Headquarters in New York City today, where the UNGASS will be held in April this year.

“To date, the impact of drug policies has traditionally been measured using a very narrow set of indicators totally detached from community concerns about health, safety, human rights and development,” said Dr. Dan Werb, Director of the ICSDP. “The scientific evidence suggests that conventional drug policies have little to no impact on patterns of illicit drug use. What’s equally important, though, is that these conventional indicators – like the amount of drugs seized or the price and purity of illicit drugs – totally fail to capture the most important ways in which drugs and drug policies affect communities.”

The open letter, signed by leading drug policy experts – including Dr. Michel Kazatchkine, Member of the Global Commission on Drug Policy, and Dr. David Nutt, former Chair of the United Kingdom’s Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs – outlines extensive scientific evidence that the indicators used to evaluate drug policy ignore some of the most important community impacts. In response, the open letter includes a preliminary set of suggested indicators that allow for governments to better assess the health, security, development and human rights impacts of their drug policies.

More than any other region in the world, Latin America has experienced sustained and ongoing security concerns as a result of drugs and drug policy. High homicide rates in some countries, including Mexico and Colombia, have been linked to the illicit drug trade and military operations targeted at drug cartels.

“The scientific evidence clearly demonstrates that the current law enforcement approach to drugs in Latin America has not only been unsuccessful in reducing levels of violence, but likely incentivized the use of violence by organized crime groups as drug market control fractured,” stressed Dr. Werb. “Governments in the region can better prioritize the safety concerns of communities by





meaningfully considering security indicators, such as the incidence of drug market-related homicide and drug market-related violence, in their evaluations of drug policy, and then adopting those policies that are most likely to lead to an improvement in these outcomes.”

According to the open letter, by adopting health, security, development and human rights indicators, governments will be better able to implement targeted and effective policies that align with community needs. The alternative is to continue the unacceptably high levels of drug-related harms, with grave implications for communities across the globe.

Members of the public are invited to join scientists in demanding that drug policies match community needs by adding their names in support of the open letter. The ICSDP has also created an online poll allowing the public to voice their top concerns when it come to drug policy.

About the International Centre for Science in Drug Policy

The International Centre for Science in Drug Policy (ICSDP) is a network of scientists and academics from all global hemispheres committed to improving the health and safety of communities and individuals affected by illicit drugs by working to inform illicit drug policies with the best available scientific evidence. With the oversight of a Scientific Board made up of leading experts on addictions, HIV, and drug policy, the ICSDP conducts research and public education on best practices in drug policy. This work is undertaken in collaboration with communities, policymakers, law enforcement and other stakeholders to help guide effective and evidence-based policy responses to the many problems posed by illicit drugs.

