

# Drug laws fail to protect children

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"Would legal regulation and control of drugs better protect children?" is a question posed by former President of Brazil, Fernando Henrique Cardoso in an editorial to be published in the January issue of Elsevier's *International Journal of Drug Policy (IJDP)*.

The editorial, "Children and drug law reform" follows the March 2011 report of the Global Commission on Drug Policy, chaired by Cardoso, which made a series of recommendations for reforms of drug laws, including experiments with legal regulation and control.

"If we believe that the best interests of the child should be a primary consideration in all policies that affect them, as enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, then children have the right to be placed front and centre in drug [policy discussions](#)", writes the former president.

Recognising the harms that have befallen children and young people around the world due to drugs prohibition, and the failure of current approaches to protect children from [drug use](#) and drug related harms, Cardoso calls for debate on a range of issues including what legal regulation and control of drugs would mean for children.

"I am convinced that the recommendations of the Global Commission will have significant benefits for children and young people," he writes, "I would not support such policies if I did not believe that current approaches have singularly failed in this respect."

But the former president urges caution in relation to possible future business interests in currently [illicit drugs](#). "Our experiences with [alcohol](#) and tobacco show that we cannot entrust such [commodities](#) to [corporations](#) whose interests are in profit maximisation not [public health](#). We cannot relinquish drugs to the criminal market, nor to an unregulated free market."

"To protect children from drugs it is to my mind now beyond debate that drug laws need to be reformed. From what we already know, the ongoing and future identified harms of current drug policies to our children must be considered not as unintended, but a result of negligence, recklessness or simple disregard," concludes Cardoso.

"President Cardoso's editorial is a challenge to politicians, researchers and activists and is a much needed contribution to an important part of the drug policy debate we all too often overlook", said Professor Gerry Stimson, Editor-in-Chief of the International Journal of Drug Policy.

"This is no doubt a very difficult and controversial area and I wholeheartedly agree with President Cardoso, we need to create an environment where it is safer to openly discuss these issues."

**More information:** "Children and drug law reform"; Cardoso, F.H.; *International Journal of Drug Policy* (2011); [doi:10.1016/j.drugpo.2011.10.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2011.10.004)

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