

International panel urges regulated markets for narcotics

September 9 2014, by Mariano Andrade

A high-level international panel called Tuesday for the decriminalization of drug use and the creation of legally regulated markets to wrest control of the narcotics trade from organized crime.

The recommendations by the Global Commission on Drug Policy, which includes a number of former presidents, comes amid shifting attitudes toward drug use and experiments with legalization of marijuana by local and national governments.

In a report called: "Taking control: pathways to drug policies that work," the commission calls for ending the criminalization and incarceration of users, and taking a public health approach to the problem.

"In order to reduce drug-related harms and undermine the power and profits of [organized crime](#), the commission recommends that governments regulate drug markets and adapt their enforcement strategies to target the most violent and disruptive criminal groups rather than punish low level players," it said.

Henrique Cardoso, a former Brazilian president and the commission's chairman, told reporters: "The key question is how to get effective control of the markets, a legal regulation of production and use of drugs. It's something really new."

He said experiments under way in different parts of the world were "going well."

He cited as examples the legalization of marijuana in some US states, alternatives to incarceration being tried in Portugal, and Uruguay's recent move to legalize and regulate the production and sale of marijuana.

Besides Cardoso, the panel includes several other former presidents from Latin America, a region at the heart of the US-backed drug wars that have raged over the past four decades. Former UN secretary general Kofi Annan is also a member.

Former Mexican president Ernesto Zedillo, a commission member, said regulations were needed because drugs are dangerous and marketing them should not be left to criminal elements.

"It is a choice between control in the hands of criminals or legal and oriented control of governments," he said.

Former Portuguese president Jorge Sampaio highlighted his own country's 2001 decision to stop incarcerating drug users, saying it led to an increase in the number of addicts seeking treatment and a reduction in drug-related deaths and disease.

"The change is possible, change pays off," he said.

In its first report in 2011, the commission denounced the "war on drugs" as a failure, and called for new thinking on [drug](#) policies.

Since then, Latin American leaders, like Colombia's President Juan Manuel Santos, Guatemala's Otto Perez Molina, Uruguay's Jose Molina and former Mexican president Felipe Calderon have been at the forefront of the debate.

Cardoso said the commission's latest report was aimed at influencing thinking on the issue ahead of a UN special session on drugs in 2016.

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