

## Wellcome to the USSA

**By Farid Ghehioeche - ENCOD's delegate to Long Beach Conference**

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Thanks Prya for help and support.

NB : A la mémoire de toutes les victimes de la guerre aux drogues  
(In memory of all the victims of the war on drugs).

When I learnt that I would be part of European Ngo Coalition for just and effective Drugs policies (ENCOD) delegation to attend the Drug Policy Alliance (DPA) conference in Long Beach on International drug policy reform, I was totally enthusiastic. I was expecting to do so for five years. After campaigning for New York United Nations General Assembly Special Session on drugs (UNGASS) strategy « /Drug free world we can do it!/ » mid-term review in Vienna 2003, the opportunity to go to the DPA conference remained one source of motivation to continue the struggle for drug policy reform.

I am writing these words with great disappointment at being denied entry into america. I will explain my « adventure » which I can only describe as « bad trip ». I write with the profound hope that we can counter this « global apartheid »,

I left Paris to London on Friday, november 4<sup>th</sup> to participate to the Hemp Fair at Wembley Park.

On sunday morning I left London for San Francisco for two days to visit a french friend before Long Beach conference. I remember that before I landed at San Francisco International Airport some of my friends in France sarcastically told me « we hope you'll come back alive », my friend in SF told me « Don't panic ! No matter what. Just tell them to phone me ». I couldn't have imagined what was about to happen.

### **Welcome to ameriKKKa !**

The plane landed sunday afternoon. After first, and secondary checkpoints, I stopped at the third check desk. Here two customer agents started to deeply look into my luggages. Many questions raised, and scrutinized my belongings and interrogated about my reasons for enterring US soil. I was sure it was a mere formality as I was answering all their questions.

On my main bag, they found the gifts for my friend's child, with all my clothes.

On my backpack bag, there was my computer, a lot of documentations around DPA conference and some others picked at Hemp fair in London (even rolling papers, you can imagine the crime !), and even some CD Rom of UNODC « /practical guide for competent national authorities under article 17 of the United Nations Convention against Illicit traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1998 in French, and Arabic, Chinese, and Russian/" . DVDs /about Ibogaïne - The rite of passage/, ENCOD campaigns and the DVD called /Green avalanche/ about Hemp and « marijuana » which I got in London.

On this pocket, folded since long time a poster of the Global March for Cannabis Liberation (GMLC) of may 2004, range here as another tool to explain what is the global opponent movement of the current drug policies, then what happened ?

After they scratched the GMCL flier and the plastic of the UNODC Cds They found 0.0001 gram of cannabis. They said it was cannabis and asked me to come with them in a little cell, for a complete overview and full body search and to test for pieces of marijuana. I didn't know there were any evidence of marijuana. I realized that I should have used a vacuum-cleaner.

I started to feel bad, as if something would happen to me in a Kafkaesque style, reminding me of the film « /Midnight Express/ », but here I was totally safe as I knew that I brought nothing with me « all in head, nothing on my body ». Many different agents came to see me as a beast of curiosity in the zoo, asking me questions without explaining my rights. I didn't made « scandal », and just kept breathing deeply and remained calm.

After 45 minutes, one of the agents interrogating me confess me he was « a libertarian » adding, « I can confess to you that even some of us would test positive». Finally they determined that they found 0.0001 GRAM OF MARIJUANA on my belongings. They brought me back to the secondary check office, where I was detained for six hours. I remained in purgatory uncertain of my fate for 40 minutes. The agent then phoned my friend whom I talked to on the phone : « Yes, I should be released in few minutes ». But then, after 20 minutes, one supervisor Mister Lau asked the agent to phone back and not allow my entry. I realised that I was fucked and I didn't know what to do... Or how to react. Should I start being more « hard » or should I be « Should I remain silent ». Or just like in Hollywood films should I ask for a lawyer and a translator (though I did not know if it was necessary at this point) Should I just say « I'm invited to the DPA conference, call Laura Kesselman or Ethan Nadelmann » ? So, for 0.0001 gram of Marijuana, I would not be allowed to enter AmeriKKKa.

### **"Zero Tolerance, the global apartheid"**

They also seized my little red tiny box gifted by the Hemp Museum in Berlin during last ENCOD general Assembly, and also my hemp rolling papers (many of those I found in UK and France). In fact, the question form all foreigners must answer when trying to enter U.S are « Yes » or « No » questions. The different laws of states are always difficult to answer, but generally people answer "No" when they know they've nothing to hide.

They say I break statute " INA 212 (a) (2) (A) (i) (II)" for 0,0001 gram of cannabis under the controlled substances act. They decided that, no way would I get onto U.S soil. But who were they ? I didn't know. Do I could or should check a lawyer ?

During my long deposit with Inspector Sim Sam, I heard one of her Chief Officer that I didn't know who he was, saying « Yes, now we got him ». It was because, I admitted to answer the questions about my first arrests in France in 1988, or 1989, or 1990... I can't remember well. At that time, I was homeless and dealing as a user who is doing his « self management opportunity » to get some social relations/supports/peers and money if possible ! But french law is different from the U.S and so I didn't want them to recognize me as a criminal or delinquent, as now I'm not regarded as a criminal in France.

Around midnight, again I was subject to a cavity search where I was examined with all my shoe laces and necklaces off, even my earring. I was handled with a chain around the hips for 40 minutes in a van cruising from San Francisco Airport to Santa Clara jail. The vans were white, with no clear signs on it. Through the armoured lattice window, I was enjoying for the first time to see what US was looked like. A big desert with big roads and big cars. I became totally depressed in chains and sobbed.

Agent Guererro told me that he would have preferred to not arrest me or put me in chains, but it was his orders. He drove with a big sound system with Eminem « Music for the masses ». My first music in America. I liked it. I preferred it to WASP music.

Again, I was body checked before entering the Police headquarter of Santa Clara. I felt like a worm or a rat enduring laboratory experiment, certainly less than human as I followed the green line, then stopped at second desk. I stood up with my hands along my body for the « pre-booking information sheet ». I sat on seat 39, followed green line to blue chair where I sat for being pictured, again finger prints, and sent in jail N°3. I tried to ask for a single cell, but it was too late to protest.

### « A salaam aleikum »

When I entered 2 guys were sleeping and a man was back on the wall on my left, three others were talking on my right, with one sleeping with the head and legs on his T shirt to resist the cold. I was cold. I sat on a little space on the left, next to one marocese with whom I could speak french. He was quickly taken out. The other 3 guys were taken off after one hour. Then, little by little it was filled with youth guys, who looked very panicked gripping their yellow papers. The older « Raggazzo Giuliani », the one who was shivering in his T shirt tried to relax them, telling us of his experience.

At that time, I told them about my 0.0001 gram of cannabis as pretexte for being denied entry into the US. They laughed a lot about my poor case. They had laces on their shoes, I had mine taken away. Was I such a threat ? And do you know what ? Ironically, in that cell I found a little plastic tube with one gram of crack-cocaine in it. If only the americans legalized pot, they would cut down hard drug epidemic. « Raggazzo Giuliani » made a rustic straw with one yellow page on ground to sniff a line and keep the rest in his shoes.

At seven o'clock, we there were 13 people crammed inside the cell, and I started to ask to be transferred into another one. They said « follow the green line, to the green box » with four others. Then, we continued on the green line while receiving 2 bread and cheese slices with a plastic glass and two packet doses of orange juice to enjoy in the « felony cell », where a television was on Catholic TV for a Bible training.

After this little sleepy session of the catholic priest, some others companeros joined us in the cell and changed TV program to « 24hours » which I learned was the premier american counter drama in the States. I made phone calls (but I couldn't as I didn't have my phone book. I tried to call France and Belgium but it was impossible), and at 8:30, I was told to follow the green line, to the green box. Here I was again cavity searched, and joined two other guys in a line of five detainees. We were all sent back to our various countries, and one (like me from France) was an EU citizen, coming from UK, but with his name and parent's origins, US department of Justice found an excuse to implement a zero tolerance policy toward him. We travelled again in this white van, and passed by Elmwood jail to get a Ghanean who was sent back after three weeks in jail, he was crying because he didn't know where his papers were.

When we arrived around 11:00 at SF international airport, two of us were asked to get out of the van, and I and my fellow prisoners from India or Pakistan were finally brought in from two different directions. I finally returned into the secondary check office, where I waited until 7 to get a plane back to France. One detail that really shocked me, was the fact that among all supervisors at secondary check three of them were wearing a big gold ring with a jade gem on it. I suspected international traffic because the gems seemed to be from Burma.

I asked to make two phone calls, and then to know if it was possible to counter the decision, and then I tried to clearly asked the supervisor if he could try to help me... but unfortunately nobody answered his phone calls and he came back with my boarding pass.

It appeared I faced "zero tolerance" I have to apply for a visa to enter USA now. Homeland Security has my file, a number, all my finger prints. What amazed me during this trip among those custom agents is: they're all recruited among what could be seen in France as « invisible minorities » and in US a « positive discriminated peoples ». The repressed employed to repress others.

### **A drug against war**

When I was chatting with the little man, « supervisor » interested by my knowledges about french culture and with whom I felt in confidence, and explained him it was very bizarre to be sent back for 0,0001 gram of cannabis in California, as that the main purpose of my trip was to go to Long Beach, and that my tickets should be cancelled or reimbursed as I was impeached by US authorities... But nothing came, just a bowl of noodles and soja milk passed away. He informed me about what happened in France, with riots not only in Paris suburbs and asked me many « dumpy dumb » questions about France, french people, and told me that as a way to gain credits « polluted air and water, poverty and nuclear peace threats are a major source of worries for next generations, and I know that we as USA are not well doing for the best of the planet ». I was a little happy to meet some of those who were my guardians, were also sensible about the US foreign policy.

I try to explain that it was also the case of the global trend taken by UN policy on drugs under the US leadership. I tried to explain him that some of the so called narcotic drugs were not as bad as it was supposed to be, that may be with cannabis (Hemp) we'll be able to challenge the huge environmental crisis by producing oil, textile, new fibers. And most important, that we may find soon that cannabis has real medicine properties to fight against multiple sclerosis, glaucoma, alzeihmer, Parkinson... and what could be said on cannabis, could be also demonstrated with the coca leaf where andean cocalers could use it for other purpose than get money from narco-trafficking.

I told him that the basis of the current drug policies of states are not good because there wasn't scientific evidences to maintain what I'm describing as an « organised crime ».

I told him sincerely, how can we succeed to make a drug free world, if even in jails you find drugs and criminality, if even within police and customs ranks some are smugglers, if even within parliamentary class who make the laws or the justice domain which use the law, you find some people who are offending the law by a personal behaviour. We must fight the criminalisation of social norms. No victim, no crime.

Last but not least, I tried to explain him that the « zero tolerance » policy is producing a new kind of delinquant, and that younger and younger, the average of the first offense shouldn't be only adressed with only a repressive stand, but with education as a kid or teenager should be taught (learn to understand). This is beyond preventing criminality and could be considered as building education relationships instead of law enforcement. This is only the attention paid to teenagers and by helping youth to be part of a society system, where they can be looked with respect and pride, that we gain fruitful results. Youth are generally looking for adult recognition, but now with « zero tolerance » family values are threatened because police and justice administration taken control of their children. I tried to convince him that large part of the gangsters culture was

mostly build on the core roots of the current political and economical system : « the law of the stronger against the weaker ».

If you look clearly at what teenagers and youths are looking for when you let them talk, it is totally opposed to this : they finally are deeply stressed and disappointed when from the child age they're discovering that the rules of the society are inhumane and not lead by social justice... that why illicit drugs consumption is so widely use by teenagers, as a way to get pleasures while they know they'll put endanger their life.

I tried to explain him also the concrete effects of the legal medicine, which are now leading to scary results. Some searches show that many teenagers that committed suicide or those who became serial killers were children previously treated for intensive activity that drove their parents crazy.

Here is the point, should we considered that the current legal drugs are endangering the youth, and that some of the narcotic drugs prohibited could enhanced society treatments for many purposes : environmental care, human care, economical and political stability, legal source of income for undeveloped economy.

What I tried to explain him was the fact, that even if I felt a great injustice and a decision that is totally disproportionnate. For sure it could be recorded in the Guinness book by the ridiculous charge against my enter on US soil. I told him that concretly I counted around 20 agents that were in charge of my case since the beginning of my troubles. How many real smugglers and terrorists could have take profit of the lack of scrutinity due to my affair ? I told him, I'm working for drug policy reform because I'd like them to be more efficient and for them to achieve a genuine control on borders of the risks, and not about creating the risk by misunderstandings and empowering injustice.

### **There is a way to refuse and resist**

Well, it is obvious that the real motive of the prohibition system is to offer a tool for police and justice control over some populations « at risk ». It is obvious now for all, that narcotic drugs prohibition has been a total failure, but there is still a « zero tolerance » trend to try to save the roots of the prohibitionist system. It is widely shared that a genuine policy on drugs should be scientifically determined, and for a real preventing we need to find a legal regulation manner to tackle the phenomenon.

This way is not just a way to take on legalisation. It is first a major challenge to educate peoples and first of them users about what drugs are and do, and for that we need them to get the truthful informations.

It is also a major challenge to eradicate money resources for all illegal group of activities such as terrorism and to clear the global accountability rules in order to eradicate money laundering circuits, that are real threats for civil liberties as a corruption hammer.

Before 2008, we need to see a coalition of country governments to raise the issue of a global review of the current and past drug strategies which failed, to enter in a new strategy, more pragmatic and less based on moral taboos.

In december 2004, the European Parliament voted a report of recommendations that were totally ignored by the EU commission for the implementation of the new action plan until 2009.

This vote is important, because in seven pages it gives the global lines of a just and effective drug policy designed in the interest of the peoples directly affected and concerned.

With Encod, we launched our campaign « Freedom to farm » last september : after « spreading seeds » since 2003 for an inclusive debate of civil society representative organisations within EU institutions, we are now close to gain this real debate to prepare 2008, UNGASS in Vienna.

Towards Vienna, there is a way to refuse and resist to the US model, if europeans are able to unite with countries such as Brasil, Canada, Australia, Switzerland and even China, India and Russia.

### **\*Open the window\***

As I'm now arrived back in France, I'm learning about what happened since last week. Now our home affair minister is seriously explaining in mass media that the riots are due to smugglers and dealers that are fighting police presence on some parts of suburbs trafficking areas.

In the mouth of our political leaders, it is like if thousands of Tony Montana were ruling the streets of the country, and that all were teenagers already experimented in thugs life, as they are only expecting and expressing a real respect and social justice. Those teenagers are all the same, from Clichy sous bois to Santa Clara California. All are asking for a better life, they want to be recognized and for sure, they'd preferred to not be confined onto illegal way of survival.

It is clear that soon the crisis will extend as those revendications are not only shared by teenage riotters, but by a large part of the population who are now fed up by broken promises and political management since the last thirty years.

Some say it might be for the worst, let's hope that protesters will win and help us to take a new aspiration again. Let's not talk about revolution, but just opening the window to hear what is behind their language of riots.

----- Sorry for being so long, thanks for your reading and I hope to get some of your comments. No copyrights - spread it worldwide thanks...