

WHAT TO DO IN VIENNA 2009 ?

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Joep Oomen

In June 1998, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a political declaration in which a ten year strategy was announced "to eliminate or significantly reduce the illicit manufacture, marketing and trafficking of psychotropic substances" in the world. On the CND meeting that will start on March 10th, UNODC's Executive Director Antonio Maria Costa will present the following results to the governments:

"global illicit OPIUM poppy production has reached 8.800 tons in 2007, which is double the amount produced in 1998." Afghanistan alone accounts for 93% of global illicit opium production, Afghan opium production has increased more than 10 times since the US invasion in 2001.

"global COCAINE production stood at 984 tons in 2006, an increase of over 19% since 1998." Colombia alone stands for 62% of global cocaine manufacturing

"approximately 42.000 tons of CANNABIS herb were produced in 2005, an increase of 40 % compared to 1998." A third of which is produced in the United States and Canada.

That means that an average of 62 % of the worlds most used illegal drugs are produced in areas that are supposed to be under the control of the United States Government, at least the US are the dominating military actor in these areas.

Now who are the BENEFICIARIES of the current situation? According to United Nations, 400 to 500 billion dollars is the estimated global revenue of the illegal drugs trade. As the production costs of drugs like cannabis, cocaine and heroin are to be neglected, this means that each second, approx. 10.000 euro is earned with the sale of drugs, thanks to the fact that they are illegal.

Less known are the costs of the drug war to public expenditure. According to Ethan Nadelmann of the US Drug Policy Alliance, the public expenses related to enforcement of drug laws (so costs for police, legal apparatus, prisons, customs and army) can be estimated to be 40 billion euro/year. So the past ten years approx. 400 billions of euros of tax money has been spent on a public policy that never met its objectives, has had serious counterproductive effects, increased the burden on citizens who have very little or no share in the illegal drug market, while having no measurable impact on the global size of this market at all.

To hide this enormous failure the UNs own drug czar, Antonio Maria COSTA some years ago introduced the term containment as the true goal of drug control. From now on, the war on drugs is not anymore on reducing the supply and demand of drugs, but on reducing the increase of these. So atrocities are being committed, such as life sentences for being associated to minor drug offences, or the spraying of the lives of millions of farmers and their natural environment in the name of a war that is not meant ever to be won or lost, its meant to exist, to justify the use of force, to legitimise the stigmatisation of people.

If drug prohibition was a private enterprise, it would have gone broke long ago. But instead of SHAREHOLDERS, those who direct it are all civil servants trained to have one sole interest: status quo. They will meet again on Monday, carrying suitcases, making speeches, making notes, making copies, running around between meeting rooms as if it all had any significance at all, but in fact the reason they are there is to ensure nothing important happens at all.

There will be a few external observers: some journalists, one or two parliament members and lobbyists from several organisations, prohibitionist and anti-prohibitionist. Some of them with concrete proposals to solve a part of the problem for a group of people, such as the Senlis Council, who will make another effort to promote their POPPY FOR MEDICINE proposal, to buy parts of the afghan opium harvest and convert it into morphine for those countries which suffer from a lack. Never ever are proposals to question the current approach taken into account in the discussions.

It seems the UNODC will propose a year of reflection on the results of these ten years before making a decision on how to continue. That means that governments will hold their cards to themselves, but in March 2009 they will have to play them. Part of this reflection process will be an NGO FORUM that will take place here in Vienna in July 2008 where 300 NGO representatives from the entire world will present their views. These people have to be nominated by other NGOs that are co-operating with the UN and the majority of which are prohibitionist. So among the 300 representatives of civil society in July we will not see any producers of cannabis, coca or opium, let alone people who have been involved in drug related offenses. Perhaps, if we are lucky, one or two declared drug users.

If you would grab 100 citizens to represent those whose lives are directly affected by drug policies, 90 of them would be consumers, 5 producers, and 5 persons representing the health agencies, families, research institutes, lobby groups etc. Still if you attend these official consultations this is about the reversed situation: the proportion of "professional institutions" is much higher than they in fact may claim to represent: often they are not representing citizens, they are actors in policies, in action plans and programmes financed by the government or the EU.

The goal of the entire consultation process is to "review best practices related to collaboration mechanisms among NGOs, governments and UN agencies" and "to adopt a series of high order principles, drawn from the Conventions and their commentaries that would serve as a guide for future deliberations on drug policy".

This kind of formulation shows what drug prohibition is all about. Both within the DRUG CONTROL apparatus and the drug market itself, individual citizens carry the heaviest burden and enjoy the least benefits, while at the international established institutions at the top, both official and unofficial, the experience is exactly the opposite. So therefore those at the top are only interested in a status quo while people who are hit hardest by the drugs phenomenon are hermetically excluded from the decision-making level.

Still in Europe, from the early 1990s until 2000/2001 we have had a warm GULFSTREAM with harm reduction and decriminalisation of use and possession

being implemented in almost all European countries, even permission for marijuana cultivation for personal use in some. Then since 2003, with the icy winds from the West, came a change of governments in many countries, and in drug policies pragmatism got replaced by paranoia. And so we have been witnessing a new phenomenon: the war on weed.

Now also in Europe, millions of police hours are being spent on the eradication of plants, criminalisation of people like ALDO BIANZINO, who was killed in an Italian prison cell in October last year after being taken with few marijuana plants in his garden, or ANDRE FÜRST, currently serving a 27 months sentence in Switzerland for growing hemp.

While we are destroying hemp plants we are eliminating small scale and sustainable agriculture - a promising solution to make revolutionary PROGRESS in the fight against climate change (Al Gore knows about hemp he has said in private that it is interesting, but never talks about it in public) against hunger and against the addiction to oil, as the basic cause of the apocalyps which we are bound to witness. Meanwhile the only consequence of this war on weed is that more people get into problems, cannabis is getting more expensive and more adulterated.

The most dangerous use of drugs is still the political. Why do politicians much better succeed in being tough on drugs than on being tough on drug prohibition? Also in politics, drugs are a taboo. A taboo that we, following the BOLIVIAN example, can turn around by organising our own political force, building on the experience that several of us are doing: tomorrow 9 March, in Spain people in 4 different regions of the country can vote on candidates of a Cannabis Party. It would not be difficult to spread this to the level of European Parliament elections, where we could lobby for a European legislation on cultivation for personal use for example.

Maybe it is too early for such kind of experimenets, maybe too late. Perhaps it is better to put our hope on presidents insjalla, Barrack Obama in November this year.

But there are other ways to organise ourselves POLITICALLY. Few kilometres from here, the iron curtain was taken down thanks to the initiatives of citizens. As ENCOD we have developed the message FREEDOM TO FARM, or the recognition of the universal right of any adult citizen to grow natural plants for personal use or non commercial purposes using any equipment available for this. UN Conventions should no longer be considered as a basis for uniform policies, national governments should be allowed to find their own way of regulating this phenomenon, and base it on the needs of their citizens.

The freedom to farm message is not only a political slogan. Throughout Europe, groups of cannabis consumers have started to establish CANNABIS SOCIAL CLUBS, organised circuits of cultivation and consumption among adults, which are not only practical solutions to urgent demands, but also models of how to organise the production and distribution of any drugs, or any goods if you wish, including on a global scale.

We should continue to build the CRITICAL MASS with those around us who want to hear and can be helpful in our struggle: parliamentarians, local and regional authorities who get fed up with the war on drugs, legal and medical experts who can

support our case and other actors in civil society who are fighting against the same powers as we do.

One advantage of the current SITUATION is that if we continue with determination, love and intelligence we can only win in 2009 and the years after. I hope to see you here again and organise a march and other happenings in the city, which we can discuss in a more limited group.

Learning how to LIVE WITH DRUGS is an act that confirms life and all the beauties of life. Through the use of mind altering substances some of us, like so many writers, musicians and artists, learn about the mysteries of the universe inside and outside us. Through the acceptance of drug use most of us in this room have learned how to tolerate but also how to distinguish solidarity from paternalism. Through the recognition of the nutritional, medicinal and industrial values of coca leaves, opium and cannabis we open up for forms of global trade relationships based on respect and not on exploitation.

Thank you very much