



EUROPEAN COALITION FOR JUST AND EFFECTIVE DRUG POLICIES
Ploegstraat 27 – 2018 Antwerpen - Belgium
info@encod.org/ www.encod.org

**TO THE DELEGATES OF THE 54th. SESSION OF THE UN COMMISSION ON
NARCOTIC DRUGS, 21 – 25 MARCH, VIENNA**

Herewith we wish to express our solidarity with the people of Japan who after suffering two natural catastrophies in a row are now facing the threat of a nuclear disaster. Our thoughts are with the direct and indirect victims of this tragedy, and to the workers who are risking their own life in order to protect that of millions of others.

In a week from now, on March 30th, it will be the 50th anniversary of the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, which obliges all member states to prohibit the production and distribution of the substances known as drugs, and in the case of plants like cannabis, opium and coca leaf, eliminate their consumption.

In 1961, governments did not know if drug prohibition would be successful or not in the prevention of health problems or social disorders. Today, evidence is abundant that it has increased, and in some cases even generated these problems. In almost all countries of the world drugs are easily accessible to all, including children. Ironically drug prohibition has created a free market without any kind of control and which is in the hands of people whose only concern is to make lots of money.

In the Andean region, since 1961 experiences with the prohibition of coca leaves have been painful. Consumers have been considered as drug addicts and producers as drugtraffickers. Due to the drugs market and the policies designed to eradicate it, Andean people have suffered violent conflicts, human rights violations, contamination of our environment, corruption of our authorities and distortion of our economy.

The Single Convention of 1961 includes the obligation of our governments to eliminate the traditional use of coca leaves. The consumption of coca leaves, exactly like that of cannabis and opium in other continents, is an integrated part of an age old culture. For the past 5.000 years, coca leaves have been used as a food supplement, a medicine and an element of meetings and celebrations in the daily life of millions of people.

The prohibition of coca leaf consumption was based on the conclusions of the UN Commission of Inquiry on the Coca Leaf in the year 1950. These conclusions have never been verified by scientific evidence on the supposed harm of the use of coca leaves. On the contrary, these conclusions have been qualified by experts from the entire world as being arbitrary, imprecise, racist and culturally insensitive.

The 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People states that “indigenous peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions.” The prohibition of coca leaves needs to be considered as a violation of this principle, and more, as a deplorable act of racism, as it justifies the criminalization and stigmatization of an age old cultural practice that does not produce any harm.

In 2009, Bolivia has requested the UN to change the text of the 1961 Convention, in order to eliminate the obligation to prohibit coca leaf consumption. The request was formulated in such a way, that the change would only apply to the Andean countries, while the global control system concerning coca leaves and cocaine would remain intact.

In January 2011, 18 countries, among them Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Russia, Sweden the UK and the USA, had presented an objection against the amendment proposal. Apparently their motivation does not have anything to do with the nature of the coca leaf or its effects on human health. It is exclusively based on the importance of maintaining the « integrity » of the UN Convention. Therewith, the 18 countries implicitly admit that the process of amending the text of the convention will inevitably lead to its dismantlement. Their message to the world is that they prefer the UN Convention to be violated than to be modified or even discussed.

Therefore we believe that Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs has ceased to be relevant. The United Nations should start to design a new strategy to control the drug phenomenon. A strategy that is built on local experiences and scientific evidence, not on moral principles that are completely out of touch with reality. As citizens of the world who are affected and concerned by the drug issue, we urge the United Nations to replace the UN Single Convention with a global agreement that will allow individual governments to design and implement their own policies.

Close to here, the International Agency on Atomic Energy is located, whose responsibility is to monitor the use of nuclear energy for peaceful means. In its statutes, it is said that its activities should be carried out with due observance of the sovereign rights of States. We suggest that the UNODC overtakes the statutes of the IAEA, while the IAEA converts the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs into an international regulation to prohibit nuclear energy.

We look forward to your decisions on this meeting.

Encod Delegation to the 54.session of the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs