



# Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform (ACT) Inc.

*committed to preventing tragedy that arises from illicit drug use*

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**NEWSLETTER**

**November, 2003**

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## Next Meeting

### Annual General Meeting

**Thursday, November 27  
7:30pm**

at St Ninians Uniting Church,  
Cnr Brigalow and Mouat Streets,  
Lyneham

Please join us at the last monthly meeting  
for 2003. It will finish with tasty refresh-  
ments and chatter.

#### **Editorial**

*This month's editorial from Bill Bush.*

For those connected to the internet ADCA provide an excellent service called Drugtalk. It is an email forum where issues of interest and concern can be discussed and debated.

Recently an analysis by one writer about the concerns about naltrexone is Drugtalk at its best. I like to think that displaying for all to see the chain of reasoning complete with its strong and weak links is the best way we have of developing good drug policy.

The writer's argument was that the merit of different drug treatments should be judged by the death rate of opiate dependent people while on the treatment or who have lapsed from it. This empirical exercise would settle the merits for many of us but we need to recognise that it is based on the assumption that the preservation of human life is the principal objective.

As I understand it, that is not the view of others.

For them the primary objective of treatment should be to help people extricate themselves from their addiction.

On this basis, providing them with a maintenance dose of an artificial opiate is at best only an interim measure and should not be provided as an indefinite treatment and no better than tolerating them continuing to use illicit drugs.

This view is based on an assumption that someone who is addicted to a drug is less than human. A view which persuaded the Government majority on the Family and Community Affairs Committee of the House of Repre-

**Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform**

invite you to a

### **PUBLIC MEETING**

on

*Monday 15<sup>th</sup> December, 2004*

**12.30pm – 2.30pm**

in the Reception Room, the Legislative Assembly  
Civic Square, London Circuit, Canberra

**Prof. Desmond Manderson**

*will speak on the*

### ***The Heroin Ban in Australia: Modern Witchcraft, Contemporary Inquisitions***

*Prof. Manderson recalls and studies the history of heroin prohibition in Australia from the events that led to its prohibition until the present day. In order to make sense of the enduring hold the policy has on politicians, policy makers, and even the general public, he argues we have to understand its psychological basis, and draws on recent scholarship into the history of witchcraft in the West to illuminate the issue*

sentatives in its report on Substance Abuse in Australia.

A view also reported to be held by the new Minister for Health, Mr Tony Abbott. In answer to a question at an "Age" Vision 2000 forum in Melbourne on why he opposed supervised injecting facilities he is reported to have said that people who are on drugs are virtually dead anyway.

The viewpoint is offensive and hurtful because it bolsters current drug policy. But it has to be addressed carefully and analytically.

There are empirical and moral aspects to the issue.

As part of the empirical aspect, it should be possible to define a set of essential human characteristics and determine whether someone addicted to drugs does or does not have them. Can they be likened to a patient on life support who satisfies sufficient criteria for it to be permissible to withdraw that support?

It is well to acknowledge that the proposition is a tough one. In order to show that someone is less than human it is not enough that by being dependent on a drug they merely fail to reach their full human potential.

Few of us ever do that for a multitude of reasons unrelated to addiction.

I am optimistic that phrasing the question in this blunt way may lead some who would have been attracted to the less than human viewpoint to reassess their position.

The moral aspect also deserves scrutiny. It is often assumed in the debate that those who hold to the less than human viewpoint of addiction derive that position from their Christian belief. The common reaction is that they should shut up because religion should have no part in the formulation of public policy in the twenty-first century.

This is an untenable and unhelpful position.

One of the criteria of what goes to make a specimen of the species *Homo Sapiens* a human being would be the possession of a sense of right and wrong.

All of us hold to values. Some will derive them from religious belief. Indeed any religion worth its salt has a lot to say about the behaviour of human beings one to the other. Others will found our values on secular principles.

It would hardly be consistent with the democratic society that we are supposed to live in if those of us who adhered to a particular religion, the ethics of which bear upon a public policy, were somehow to be debarred from participating in its formulation in contrast to those whose relevant values had a non-religious foundation.

There is a *quid pro quo*, for admitting the legitimacy of religious based values in public policy forums. Those values, as indeed should any involved in public policy issues, must be open to public scrutiny and must lay out the chain of reasoning leading from their value system that justifies the public policy stance taken.

From a Christian ethics perspective an argument that someone addicted to drugs should be regarded as less than human would surely be exposed as a travesty of Christ's teachings.

## **Adviser quits over 'corruption' at UN agency**

By Thomas Catyn in London

from: Financial Times – [www.FT.com](http://www.FT.com); Nov 02, 2003

A senior official has resigned in protest from the United Nations drug and organised crime agency, alleging it is riddled with corruption despite a recent clean-up drive.

Samuel González-Ruiz, a top adviser on organised crime at the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), has accused management of turning a blind eye to "a pattern of misappropriation of funds" and "clear acts of corruption and mismanagement" by staff, the FT has learned.

In his letter of resignation, a copy of which has been obtained by the FT, he wrote: "One can observe a pattern of irregularities in the issuing of contracts, petty corruption, and abuses of administrative discretion committed by staff with managerial responsibilities over projects and programs within my working domain."

Mr González-Ruiz, a former head of Mexico's anti-mafia unit who gained an international reputation for

taking on the country's drug cartels, charged that management took no action to investigate cases of internal corruption by staff, even after they were provided with detailed evidence.

He also said in his letter that that whistleblowers within the agency were routinely punished and that corrupt officials enjoyed "active and/or passive protection from top management".

The allegations come as the UN launches a major campaign to tackle corruption around the globe. On Friday, the General Assembly approved the world's first anti-graft treaty, a step that Kofi Annan, UN secretary-general, hailed as "a major breakthrough".

However, Mr González-Ruiz, who advises governments on fighting corruption, wrote that the UN does not itself abide by the principles enshrined in its treaty. "I do not have the stomach to be promoting a fight against organised crime and corruption around the world when I am working in an office that tolerates administrative and in some cases criminal violations," he wrote in the three-page letter to UNODC director, Antonio María Costa.

Mr Costa said on Sunday in New York that he had not yet read the letter and was "very surprised" at the allegations, which he claimed he had not heard before. He said he would meet Mr González-Ruiz immediately upon his return to Vienna on Wednesday.

Mr Costa, an economist and former secretary-general of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, was brought in last May to clean up the scandal-plagued agency after several European donors cut off funding. He told the FT in January that he was successfully overseeing a new era of transparency and good governance within the organisation and "recovering from a situation that led to an abysmal relationship with donor governments."

But critics, including former employees, charge that he has done little of substance. "He has engaged in little more than window dressing," said Tony White, a former anti-drug official at the UN agency.

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It is not the first time the UN agency has been at the centre of such accusations. Its previous director, Pino Arlacchi, was found to have mismanaged funds and skirted its rules in a plan that would have sent a yacht around the world to publicise the war on drugs.

## **MPs Vote to Downgrade Cannabis**

Source: BBC News (UK Web)

Pubdate: Wed, 29 Oct 2003

MPs have voted to downgrade cannabis from a Class B to a Class C drug, putting it in the same group as anti-depressants and steroids.

The changes, which will come into effect in the new year, mean penalties for possession of the drug will be lessened.

But under guidelines drawn up by the Association of Chief Police Officers last month, police will still have

the power to arrest users in special circumstances, such as when the drug is smoked outside schools.

The Conservatives have described the move as "liberalisation" and say cannabis will become "semi-legal", a claim denied by the government.

### 'Confusing Message'

And the Police Federation, which represents 130,000 police officers, is also against downgrading the drug to Class C.

Chairman John Barry said the plans sent out "a confusing and conflicting message", especially to young people.

Mr Blunkett believes the law must be changed to let police spend more time dealing with more harmful Class A drugs like crack cocaine and heroin which account for more crime.

At the moment, about 80,000 people are arrested and fined for possession every year.

After a change in rules, anyone caught in possession of cannabis will only receive a warning and will have their drugs confiscated.

### 'Reefer Madness'

But some drugs law campaigners are concerned about a failure in the guidelines to spell out the amount of cannabis deemed as being "for personal use".

Danny Kushlick, director of Transform, a national charity campaigning for reform, said that while the health impacts of cannabis were hotly disputed, it was obvious that illegal production was less safe than if it were regulated.

"The only way to ensure that cannabis users are aware of the strength, purity and potential dangers of cannabis is to legalise, regulate and control its production and supply," he added.

But Lesley King-Lewis, chief executive of Action on Addiction, said the move would increase cannabis use. She said: "As many as one in 10 cannabis users become addicted.

Cannabis use is associated with cancers of the mouth, tongue, throat, oesophagus and lung and reductions in fertility as well as with mental illnesses such as schizophrenia and depression."

### **Joint operation**

*Under pressure from both Berlin and the Hague, Dutch coffee shop culture is under threat, writes Andrew Osborn*

Friday October 24, 2003

A thick pall of sweet-smelling hashish has hung over the Netherlands since the first "coffee shop" opened its doors in 1972.

Since then, the country's famously relaxed drug laws have attracted droves of weed

lovers from across the globe and earned the country a sometimes controversial reputation for unparalleled liberality.

At its peak in 1997 the country's network of coffee shops ran to almost 1,200 cafes where anyone over 18 could exercise their legal right to buy up to five grams (a sixth of an ounce) of marijuana at a time. But thirty years later, the novelty appears to have worn off and the increasingly conservative Dutch authorities are drawing up plans to turn back the clock.

With the conservative Christian Democrat party holding sway in the latest three-party coalition and the Labour party consigned to opposition, the country's traditionally liberal approach towards drugs are up for review.

This week the Dutch public got a foretaste of exactly how the government is planning to sweep aside decades of tolerance, when justice minister Piet Hein Donner publicly outlined plans to allow only Dutch citizens to visit coffee shops.

In a move designed to tackle the perceived scourge of drug tourists, he said that coffee shop customers should be asked to show their passport and prove that they live locally before being served.

Concerned too about the prevalence of hard drugs in the Netherlands, he threatened to withdraw the landing rights of any airline regularly found to be transporting drug smugglers from former colonies such as the Antilles and Surinam.

His comments come hot on the heels of a decision to ban Dutch police officers from frequenting coffee shops, the construction of emergency jail cells for drug smugglers and a tough new anti-smoking law which stipulates that employees should not be exposed to tobacco smoke.

The Dutch coffee shop business, it is fair to say, is not what it once was.

New figures show that the number of drug cafes fell to 782 legal establishments last year from 1,200 in 1997, a drop of over 30%. In the past six years hundreds of coffee shops found to be flouting the law by offering harder drugs or selling to underage customers were shut down - either permanently or temporarily - and had their sales licences revoked.

This latest crackdown appears, however, to be far more serious than anything which has preceded it. The Dutch government is under mounting pressure to take action

from neighbouring Germany, which sees thousands of its citizens flood across the border in search of marijuana every day.

Many of the dozens of towns that squat on the Dutch side of the border between the two countries have been transformed into open-air drugs supermarkets.

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The problem is at its worst in Venlo, a town of 90,000 people nestling on the banks of the river Maas in the south of the country. Just five minutes drive from the German border, it is awash with drugs, dealers and tourists. Five million Germans live within 30 miles, and as many as 4,000 of them visit every day.

Angered by such liberality on its doorstep, Berlin wants nothing less than a total ban on soft drugs in the Netherlands. The Dutch authorities seem unlikely to go that far but they do mean business. A treaty allowing the German and Dutch police to cooperate in border regions is likely to be signed soon and the Dutch government is reportedly close to drawing up new narcotics legislation.

The Dutch government may, however, find the going uphill. It wants local councils and coffee shops themselves to stop foreigners from buying pot, but neither seem keen to comply. Both the councils and the cafes say they believe that the move would merely push the entire drugs trade underground and force people to buy off street dealers and criminals.

There is also the small matter of money. In 1999, the latest year for which figures are available, Dutch coffee shops turned over Euros300m (£210m) - money which is all subject to government tax.

The Dutch government is therefore faced with a stark choice: to keep taking the money or to appease the Germans.

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### ***More Death Squad Drug Killings in the Philippines***

<http://stopthedrugwar.org/chronicle/309/philippines.shtml>

As previously reported by DRCNet, the Philippines' highly-publicized war on drugs has been marked by

murder. Drug dealers and users on police lists are found shot to death on a regular basis, and while police blame drug gang wars for the killings, everyone else is pointing at shady vigilante death squads. In September, the local media reported a death toll of 125 in General Santos City alone, and the shadowy executioners were busy last weekend in Davao del Sur on Mindanao island.

According to the Mindanao Gold Star Daily, "armed men believed to be members of the dreaded 'death squad' killed at least five suspected pushers in Santa Cruz town." The murders are only the latest in Santa Cruz, where the mayor is complaining that killing drug suspects could erode public support in the drug war, a local government unit has formally asked the Philippine National Police to stop such executions, and a local congressman is threatening to raise the issue in the lower House.

The Filipino government of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo has in the past two years embarked on an anti-drug crusade so extreme that mainstream politicians are howling for the death penalty to be imposed against drug traffickers, schoolchildren are being encouraged to turn in drug users, and elected officials give a wink and a nod to the extracurricular activities of their police.

Recently, Davao City Mayor Rodrigo Duterte shrugged off charges that he is behind the killings there. "If they think it's me, so be it," he said. Duterte also denied the murders were government-sponsored. "There are just people out there perhaps who could not tolerate the proliferation of illegal drugs in the city," he told the Philippine Star Daily. Duterte also warned drug sellers and users who had turned themselves in to avoid the death squads that if they returned to their old ways either the vigilantes or the law would get them.