

Civil Society and International Drug Policy in the Context of Agenda 2030  
*“How Drug De-criminalization, Regulation and Harm Reduction Supports  
Agenda 2030”*

Presented by Randy Thompson at the  
60<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs

As it's positive name shows, Help Not Handcuffs seeks drug policies that prioritize the health and well being of people, families and communities as well as other relevant social justice issues. Our work is done by promoting recovery support, harm reduction, human rights and regulation of drug markets. We help policy-makers recognize the distinction between harms that may arise from drug use versus public policy caused harms, which exist due to drug prohibition.

In the context of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals we have to be sure our drug policies support, rather than undermine our efforts to implement Agenda 2030. Shifting to harm reduction, de-criminalization, and regulation of drugs alleviates prohibition caused harms and aligns with the SDGs. Many of these pro-SDG policies are still stigmatized however. Showing how their implementation will benefit the overall health and well-being of communities while freeing up resources will be key to dialogues going forward.

The following examples use U.S. based statistics.

**SDG #10**

**Reduce Inequalities Within and among Countries**

Ending the use of arrest for drug possession will eliminate the intentional harm of this policy, which engenders a social disability by limiting the employment, educational, housing and social service prospects due to a criminal record. In addition drug arrests are racially disparate, ending this harsh imbalance will bring equality to diverse populations, keep families together rather than forcibly separate them and leave open more doors to opportunity.

**SDG #16**

**Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions**

Ending drug possession arrests will significantly reduce police violence and police sexual assault and allow a healthier relationship between law enforcement institutions and the public. Intensive drug enforcement causes a rise in police violence and police sexual assault (ACLU), again in a racially disparate manner. Even more troubling is the disparity in justice when seeking police accountability as complaints against police have roughly half the conviction and incarceration rate as the general public.

### **SDG #3**

#### **Ensure healthy lives and promote well being for all ages**

Harm Reduction/Regulation of drugs creates legal institutions that make drug use safer and protect human rights and dignity. Illegally Manufactured Fentanyl deaths are a prohibition driven harm. Because street heroin is not regulated, there is no quality control or guarantees of how pure it is, or if it is adulterated.

In two years, New Jersey saw nearly a ten-fold increase in fentanyl-related deaths (46 in 2013 – 417 in 2015). Prohibition policy has removed all of the legal institutions, which would have offered protections for consumers. Reinstating conservative harm reduction/regulatory approaches like drug consumption rooms and heroin assisted treatment programs have been successful in removing all or a significant amount of this risk.

Another successful example are syringe access programs. When provided with sterile injecting equipment, injection drug users can greatly reduce their risk of getting HIV/AIDS, hepatitis and other blood borne diseases. While there are approximately 200 needle exchanges in the U.S. there is still little money appropriated for them and the use of federal funds are greatly restricted. This is despite the cost savings of a clean syringe costing a few pennies versus the cost of treating lifetime AIDS being close to \$500,000. These funding restrictions threaten the goal of ensuring healthy lives and promoting well being for all ages in addition to the reduced inequality goal.

#### **Recommendations**

In order to ensure that “no one is left behind” care must be taken by the U.N. and its member states to engage affected populations, especially those that understand or have experienced institutional betrayal and the harms of systematically violent drug policies. Transformation of our world towards the Agenda 2030 will not be possible without transforming our drug policies away from prohibition.