

## Statement/Énoncé

For immediate release

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### **CANADIAN GROUPS WELCOME INTERNATIONAL REPORT CONDEMNING FAILED “WAR ON DRUGS”**

*Evidence and human rights – not swelling prisons – are critical to sound drug policy,  
both here and abroad*

**June 2, 2011** — We, the undersigned organizations, welcome today’s release of a landmark report by the Global Commission on Drug Policy. It not only denounces the “war on drugs” as a failure but also puts forth a series of major recommendations for political leaders worldwide to adopt evidence- and rights-based approaches to drug policy.

The Commission represents the most renowned group of international political leaders ever to speak in a unified voice against the so-called “war on drugs.” The authors recognize that it is ultimately a war on people, and especially on people with addictions. The Commission’s report makes the case for alternatives to imprisonment for people who use and sell drugs and for a public health approach to drug use and addiction. As well, the Commission’s report also calls for a more profound “paradigm shift”.

Specifically, the report calls on governments to:

- end the criminalization and stigmatization of people who use drugs but who do no harm to others;
- experiment with various models of the legal regulation of currently-prohibited drugs, especially cannabis; and
- ensure the availability of a variety of treatment methods and harm reduction measures that have proven successful in many European countries and also in Canada.

The Commission’s call reflects the arguments that we have made for many years for a humane and rational public policy regarding drugs in Canada. Indeed, the timing of the release of the Commission’s report could not be more opportune for our country. Currently, the Supreme Court of Canada is deliberating the fate of Insite, the supervised injection site in Vancouver. Various published evaluations provide overwhelming and incontrovertible scientific evidence that Insite is both cost-effective and humane in meeting its objectives of preventing death and disease among some of those people who are most vulnerable. Such critical health services should be expanded, not threatened with closure.

Yet, in the name of getting “tough on crime,” an omnibus crime bill package — which includes mandatory minimum sentences for certain drug offences — is also likely to be presented in Parliament this month. Its passage will result in a large increase in the number of people in prison, many of them for drug-related offences. Yet the billions of dollars of taxpayers’ money to be spent on more prosecutions and punishment will do nothing to reduce drug use or drug-related crime. Instead, it will contribute to unnecessary suffering for individuals, families and communities. This has been well illustrated in other countries with such laws, such as the United States, and will further damage public health by contributing to the spread of blood-borne diseases such as HIV and hepatitis C, including in prisons. These are exactly the sort of measures that have been internationally denounced with the release today of the Commission’s report.

Canada would do well to heed the conclusions and recommendations of the esteemed members of the Global Commission on Drug Policy and see how policies based on evidence, human rights and public health are key to a sensible and successful approach to drug use in Canada.

Signatories:

B.C. Civil Liberties Association  
Beyond Prohibition Foundation  
Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network  
Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange  
Canadian Drug Policy Coalition  
Canadian Foundation for Drug Policy  
Canadian Harm Reduction Network  
Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network  
Canadian Students for Sensible Drug Policy  
Canadian Treatment Action Council  
Centre for Addictions Research of BC  
COUNTERfit Harm Reduction Program, South Riverdale Community Health Centre  
Harm Reduction Victoria  
Health Officers Council of British Columbia  
Interagency Coalition on AIDS and Development  
Keeping the Door Open Society  
Méta d'Âme  
Pivot Legal Society  
Réseau d'aide pour personnes utilisant de opioïds au Quebec (RAPDOQ)  
Streetworks, Edmonton  
Toronto Drug Users Union  
TRIP! Project  
Urban Health Research Initiative, British Columbia Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS  
Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users (VANDU)

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*The Global Commission on Drug Policy exists to bring to the international level an informed, science-based discussion about humane and effective ways to reduce the harm caused by drugs to people and societies. Current membership comprises Fernando Henrique Cardoso, César Gaviria, Ernesto Zedillo and Ruth Dreifuss, the former Presidents of Brazil, Colombia, Mexico and Switzerland respectively; Prime Minister of Greece George Papandreou; former Secretary General of the United Nations Kofi Annan; renowned entrepreneur and advocate Richard Branson; former U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz; former Chairman of the United States Federal Reserve and of the Economic Recovery Board Paul Volcker; and other world leaders. Further information about the Commission can be found at <http://www.globalcommissionondrugs.org/>.*