

THE VIENNA DECLARATION fact sheet

The Vienna Declaration calls for the incorporation of scientific evidence into illicit drug policies. Research shows that the criminalization of illicit drug users is fuelling the HIV epidemic and has resulted in overwhelmingly negative health and social consequences. A full policy reorientation is needed.

Key facts that support the Vienna Declaration include:

Global scale of drug use

- The largest numbers of injection drug users are in Russia, India and China, but injection drug use now occurs in over 148 countries worldwide, and continues to expand ^{1,2}
- Estimates suggest there are approximately 15.9 million people who inject drugs globally ¹

Failure of the current “War On Drugs” approach

- Over the past several decades, international surveillance systems have shown that drug purity has generally increased while drug prices have decreased ³
- There is no evidence that law enforcement reduces the prevalence of drug use ⁴
- Studies show a direct link between drug law enforcement and various harms including increased HIV risk behaviour and drug-related violence ^{5,6}

Costs of the current approach

- Approximately \$2.5 trillion (USD) has been spent on drug control efforts since the 1960's ⁷
- The US spends approximately \$20 billion (USD) per year just on drug law enforcement ⁸
- The international illegal drug market is worth an estimated \$320 billion (USD) per year; these profits are entirely outside of government control and fuel corruption and violence ⁹

Health impacts

- Outside of sub-Saharan Africa, 1 in 3 new HIV cases occur in intravenous drug users ^{10,11}
- In areas of Eastern Europe and Central Asia, HIV prevalence may be up to 70% among people who inject drugs ¹
- Hepatitis C prevalence among intravenous drug users is estimated to be as high as 90-95% in some Eurasian countries ¹²
- Prohibitions on sterile needles and opioid substitution therapy results in avoidable HIV and HCV transmission ^{2,13}
- Methadone is an effective treatment for heroin use that is on the WHO's List of Essential Medicines, but is illegal in Russia where 1 in 100 adults are already infected – largely because of heroin use

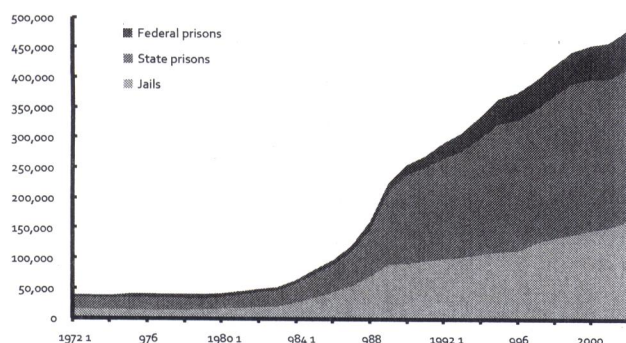
Social impacts

- About 1 in 9 African American men aged 25 to 29 is incarcerated on any given day in the United States, mostly because of drug law violations ¹⁴
- Drug-related crime, violence and corruption has destabilized entire countries such as Columbia, Mexico and Afghanistan ¹⁵⁻¹⁷
- In Mexico alone, there have been 22,743 deaths due to drug-related violence since 2006 ¹⁸

For more information, visit: www.viennadeclaration.com

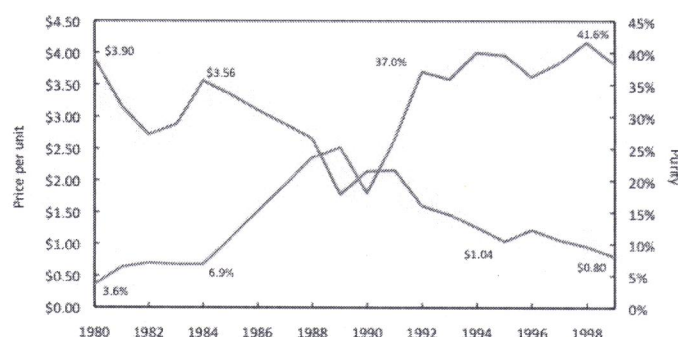
For video, visit: <http://bit.ly/warondrugsvideo>

Estimated number of adults incarcerated for drug law violations in the United States, 1972–2002



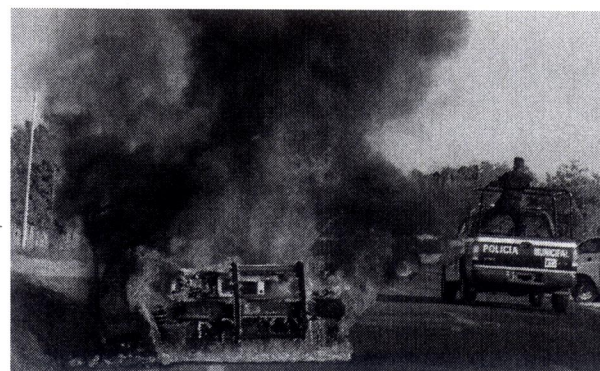
Source: Data were extracted from Beck (1997), Beck & Glaze (2002), Cahalan (1986), Harrison & Karberg (2003), and Pastore & Maguire (2003) as described in Caulkins et al. (2006)

Heroin price (red line) and purity (blue line) in the United States, 1980–1999



Source: *Briefing Book 2001* (Drug Enforcement Administration, Washington, DC)

"The criminalisation of drug users is fuelling the HIV epidemic and has resulted in overwhelmingly negative health and social consequences. A full policy reorientation is needed."
- Vienna Declaration



Police officers drive past a burning police vehicle in the Pacific resort town of Zihuatanejo, Mexico, on February 25, 2009. Earlier, gunmen opened fire and hurled grenades at the patrol car, killing four officers. (AP photo / Felipe Salinas)

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INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR SCIENCE IN DRUG POLICY

August 20, 2010

City of Toronto
100 Queen Street West
Toronto ON M5H 2N2

Dear Mayor and Council:

First, we would like to take the opportunity to recognize the City of Toronto for your demonstrated commitment to humane and evidence-based approaches to drug policy. The Toronto Drug Strategy is founded on the four pillars approach to drug policy, and has been utilized by Council as a tool to convene and collaborate with a diversity of stakeholders and communities around drug policy and addiction issues, and to advocate for evidence-based program and policy changes at the provincial and federal levels. These efforts should be commended.

As you are likely aware, we are currently at a very critical juncture in drug policy, both nationally and internationally. Research shows that the criminalization of illicit drug users is continuing to fuel the HIV epidemic and has resulted in overwhelmingly negative health and social consequences. Outside of sub-Saharan Africa, 1 in 3 new HIV cases occur in intravenous drug users, and in some areas of Eastern Europe, HIV prevalence may be as high as 70% among people who inject drugs. Drug-related crime, violence and corruption have destabilized entire countries such as Mexico, Columbia and Afghanistan; the drug war in Mexico has claimed more than 22,000 lives in the past four years alone. Sadly, this drug war violence is not unfamiliar to many Canadian communities. In addition, approximately US\$2.5 trillion has been spent on drug control efforts since the start of the "war on drugs" in the 1960s. Despite this, international surveillance systems have shown that drug purity has increased, drug prices have decreased, and drug use has remained unchanged.

Many of the negative consequences of drug prohibition are most pronounced at the local level in our cities and our communities. In response to this, the United States Conference of Mayors unanimously approved a resolution at their 2007 annual meeting, stating that "the United States Conference of Mayors believes the War on Drugs has failed and calls for a New Bottom Line in US drug policy, a public health approach that concentrates more fully on reducing the negative consequences associated with drug abuse, while ensuring that our policies do not exacerbate these problems or create new social problems of their own."

Today we are asking for your support for a similar initiative: the Vienna Declaration.

The Vienna Declaration is a scientific statement that seeks to improve community health and safety by calling for evidence-based drug policies. It was drafted by a writing committee of international experts in the field of HIV and drug policy and was the official declaration of the XVIII International AIDS Conference—the largest public health conference in the world, attracting more than 20,000 delegates—held this year in Vienna from July 18 to 23.

THE INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR SCIENCE IN DRUG POLICY

608 – 1081 Burrard Street ♦ Vancouver BC V6Z 1Y6 ♦ Canada

info@icsdp.org ♦ www.icsdp.org

In short, the Vienna Declaration states that the criminalization of illicit drug users has resulted in a number of unintended and devastating health and social consequences. It is fuelling the HIV epidemic, helping to enrich organized crime, and escalating violence in our communities. Although evidence continues to mount that the current "war on drugs" prohibition policy approach has failed to achieve its stated objectives, it is still the dominant policy approach adopted by governments around the world. The Vienna Declaration states that a full policy reorientation is needed and that drug policies should be based on evidence, not ideology. The text of the Vienna Declaration is enclosed for your further review and discussion.

In just over one month, more than 16,000 individuals and more than 400 organizations internationally have endorsed the Vienna Declaration. Among the signatories are six Nobel Laureates, thousands of scientific experts, a diversity of academic, faith-based, and civil society organizations, law enforcement leaders, and the judiciary in many countries around the world. It has also been formally endorsed by former heads of state Fernando Henrique Cardoso (former President of Brazil), Ernesto Zedillo (former President of México) and César Gaviria (former President of Colombia). In Canada, the declaration has been endorsed by five Provincial Health Officers, the Canadian Association of AIDS Research, and the Canadian Public Health Association. The National Post newspaper also endorses the Vienna Declaration and supports the call for a "wholesale drug policy rethink" (see enclosed).

Support from the scientific community and civil society is strong and we are now turning our attention to informing elected officials about the Vienna Declaration and its aims and what they can do to support it. It is time for governments and elected representatives to take a leadership role in calling for and implementing evidence-based drug policies. By endorsing the Vienna Declaration, you will align yourself with progressive leaders around the world and join them in sending an important message to the international community that drug policy must be based on science, not ideology.

The City of Toronto has already demonstrated leadership in its commitment to health- and evidence-based approaches to dealing with the challenges of illicit drugs. We hope you agree that the Vienna Declaration is consistent with the goals and objectives of Toronto's Drug Strategy and previous decisions and actions of Council.

We look forward to Toronto formally endorsing the Vienna Declaration.

Yours sincerely,



Evan Wood, MD, PhD

On behalf of the Vienna Declaration Writing Committee

Associate Professor, Division of AIDS, Faculty of Medicine, University of British Columbia

Director, Urban Health Research Initiative,

British Columbia Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS

Director, International Centre for Science in Drug Policy

604.314.7971

evanw@cfcenet.ubc.ca

The war isn't working

Last week, Canadians heard howls of protest that Stephen Harper hadn't attended the World AIDS Conference in Vienna, and that Health Minister Leona Aglukkaq had "failed" to sign the Vienna Declaration on global anti-drug policy. This did not speak well of Canadian politics, which can be insufferably myopic. It seems no other G20 leader attended the conference, and certainly no world leader or health minister has signed, or would dare sign, the Vienna Declaration — which essentially calls for a wholesale reassessment of our current approach to fighting drug trafficking and addiction.

That's their problem, not the declaration's. We endorse the call for a wholesale drug policy rethink. But until the political zeitgeist changes there's no point hurling rotten fruit at Mr. Harper or any other cheerleader for the status quo. Far better to persuade them their position

was a weeks-long battle in the slums of Kingston between Jamaican forces and the heavily armed supporters of cocaine kingpin Christopher "Dudus" Coke — at a cost of 73 lives on an island where the cocoa leaf doesn't even grow. All of it to feed the habits of Americans and Canadians, and all backed and financed by their capitals. Statistics suggest rates of drug usage are falling gradually in Canada, and that's good news — but no one could claim with a straight face that this is down to a lack of supply, or that criminal traffickers are considering going straight *en masse*.

One doesn't have to believe drugs are physiologically or morally harmless, or to support harm reduction efforts like Vancouver's Insite safe injection clinic (about which we are skeptical), or even advocate (as we do) the decriminalization of the marijuana trade, to endorse the declaration's most basic demand: that governments "undertake a transparent review of the effectiveness of current drug policies" and "implement and evaluate a science-based public health approach to address the individual and community harms stemming from illicit drug use."

Again, we don't expect Mr. Harper (who is ideologically committed to prohibition) or Ms. Aglukkaq (who is ideologically committed to Mr. Harper) to sign on to such a document. But along with many prominent activists, medical researchers and Nobel laureates, the Vienna Declaration's signatories include Ernesto Zedillo, Cesar Gaviria and Fernando Henrique Cardoso, the former presidents, respectively, of Mexico, Colombia and Brazil. They know whereof they speak.

Perhaps their fellow ex-presidents, ex-prime ministers and ex-health ministers might consider speaking up. We recall in particular a certain Liberal prime minister from Shawinigan, who used to claim to want to decriminalize marijuana. His successor times three, Michael Ignatieff, now postures as an avid prohibitionist whose public position amounts to "pot is bad, so it should be illegal." This is not progress.

There's nothing impossible about adopting a more sensible, less brutalizing alternative to what Conrad Black has called the "corrupt, sociopathic war on drugs." Impossible would be trying to sell the current approach to the world, knowing what we know now. Important people who realize this must make their voices heard. Enough innocent people have died.

Let's adopt a more sensible alternative to the battle against drugs

is untenable. And the Vienna Declaration does an admirable job of that, in clear, non-hysterical language. "The evidence that law enforcement has failed to prevent the availability of illegal drugs, in communities where there is demand, is now unambiguous," it reads. "Over the last several decades, national and international drug surveillance systems have demonstrated a general pattern of falling drug prices and increasing drug purity — despite massive investments in drug law enforcement." The source of these wild-eyed claims? A report from the United States Office of National Drug Control Policy, circa George W. Bush.

The costs of the war on drugs have been staggering to its developing world battlegrounds. Fifteen years ago it was the Colombian cartels battling each other, their government's forces and Washington, at a cost of billions of dollars and thousands of lives. Now, as Colombia flirts hesitantly with stability, it's Mexican President Felipe Calderon's war on his own country's incredibly powerful, ruthless and corrupting drug gangs, at a cost of 23,000 lives since 2006. Most recently, it

Why our drug policy is 'inconsistent' with all available evidence



DAN GARDNER

It's safe to assume most people have never heard of the "Vienna Declaration." And that simple fact helps explain why public policies that fail — policies that do vastly more harm than good — can live on despite overwhelming evidence of their failure.

The Vienna Declaration, published in the medical journal *The Lancet*, is an official statement of the 16th International AIDS Conference, which wraps up today in Vienna. Drafted by an international team of public health experts, including Evan Wood of the University of British Columbia, the Vienna Declaration seeks to "improve community health and safety" by

in the words of the committee, "filling for the incorporation of scientific evidence into illicit drug policies." Please don't stop reading. I promise this will not turn into

another of my rants about the catastrophic failure of drug prohibition. I've been writing variations on that theme for more than a decade now and everyone knows I am a crazed extremist whose views are not to be trusted by decent folk. I'll spare you.

Instead, I will merely present a few sentences from the Vienna Declaration:

■ "The criminalization of illicit drug users is fueling the HIV epidemic and has resulted in overwhelming health and social consequences."

■ "There is no evidence that increasing the ferocity of law enforcement meaningfully reduces the prevalence of drug use."

■ "The evidence that law enforcement has failed to prevent the availability of illegal drugs, in communities where there is demand, is now unambiguous. Over the last several decades, (there has been) a general pattern of failing drug prices — despite massive investments in drug law enforcement."

■ "Existing policies have produced a massive illicit market. ... These profits remain entirely outside the control of

government. They fuel crime, violence and corruption in countless urban communities and have destabilized entire countries, such as Colombia, Mexico, and Afghanistan."

■ "Billions of tax dollars (have been) wasted on a 'war on drugs' approach...."

■ "Governments should undertake a transparent review of the effectiveness of current drug policies."

■ "A full policy reorientation is needed."

Remarkable, isn't it? It's exactly what this crazed extremist has been saying for more than a decade and yet the people who wrote and signed it are anything but crazed extremists. Among them is a long list of esteemed public health experts, including the president of the International AIDS Society, the executive director of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB, and Malaria, and Canada's own Dr. James Orlowski. There are former presidents of Brazil, Mexico, and Colombia. And there are several Nobel laureates, including the economist Vernon Smith. (See the full list of signatories, along with the statement, at viennadeclaration.com).

This should be big news. Drug policies affect everything from the local street corner to the war in Afghanistan — and here is a long list of informed and eminent people who agree what we are currently doing is a horrifying mistake that wastes money and takes lives. The public should be alarmed.

But this is not big news. And the public is not alarmed. In fact, most of the public has never heard of the Vienna Declaration. Why not?

To answer that, let me take you way back to Sept. 5, 1989. That evening, U.S. president George H.W. Bush made a televised national address. Holding up a bag labeled "evidence," Bush explained that this was crack seized at the park across the street from the White House. Crack is everywhere, he said. It's an epidemic. Bush vowed "victory over drugs."

The whole thing was a fraud. Federal agents had tried to find someone selling drugs in the park but couldn't. Posing as customers, they called a drug dealer and asked him to come to the park. Where the (expletive) is the White House? the

dealer said. So the police gave him directions.

This chicanery was exposed not long after but it didn't matter. Bush's address was a smash. The media bombarded the public with hysterical stories about the "crack epidemic." Popular concern soared. And all this occurred while nearly every flicker of drug use was dropping, noted sociologists Craig Reinarman and Harry G. Levine.

The power to throw the switch on media coverage isn't exclusive to the White House, of course. In 1998, the United Nations convened a General Assembly Special Session which brought leaders from all over the world to discuss illicit drugs. The media deluged the public with stories about drugs — and the UN's official goal, signed at the end of the assembly by all member states, of "eliminating or significantly reducing the illicit cultivation of the coca bush, the cannabis plant and the opium poppy by the year 2008."

Time passed. The Special Assembly was forgotten. When 2008 rolled around, cocaine output had increased 30 per cent and opium production had doubled. But this spectacular failure was almost completely ignored in the media. Why? The UN's skewed man. So did national governments. With no major institutions putting the sub-

ject on the agenda, the media ignored it.

This is the essential problem: If governments talk about drugs, journalists talk about drugs; if they don't, we don't. And since governments are full of people whose budgets, salaries, and careers depend on the status quo, they talk about drugs when doing so is good for the status quo, but they are silent as mimes when it's not. Thus the media become the unwitting propaganda arm of the status quo.

I'm not sure what it will take to change this. It would certainly help if the media would stop letting governments decide what is news and what is not. Even better would be leaders with the courage to put evidence ahead of cheap politics, entrenched thinking, and vested interests.

But that's not happening. And so, on Monday, the government of Canada felt free to categorically reject the Vienna Declaration because it is "inconsistent" with its policies — policies which have never been subjected to evidence-based evaluation and would surely be condemned if they were.

This is how failure lives on.

Dan Gardner's column appears Wednesday, Friday and Saturday.
E-mail: dagardner@thecriken.com, carwest.com.

On the street, you can see the harm caused by drug laws

BY DAVID BRATZER

Like many other police officers, I have witnessed the tragedy of the HIV epidemic first hand. It is one thing to read the statistics demonstrating the connection between illicit drug use and HIV; it is another matter entirely to patrol the streets, day in and day out, repeatedly arresting men and women infected with the HIV virus.

Our country has one of the finest health-care systems in the world, but our laws surrounding drug use result in unnecessary disease and death.

In this context, the recent announcement of the Vienna Declaration has bolstered my conviction that drug prohibition is a national policy failure.

The document, inspired by an international team of leading health scientists and academic physicians, is the official declaration of this month's International AIDS Conference in Vienna. It presents an important scientific fact that I see reflected in my work every day: "The criminalization of illicit drug users is fuelling the HIV epidemic and has resulted in overwhelmingly negative health and social consequences."

The declaration calls for a "full policy reorientation." This should not be misconstrued as an endorsement of drug use. It is simply a recognition that drug law enforcement is not an effective deterrent, citing studies showing "there is no evidence that increasing the ferocity of law enforcement meaningfully reduces the prevalence of drug use."

It is also a recognition that drug law enforcement is contributing directly to the HIV epidemic. In most parts of the world, approximately one in three HIV infections can be traced back to intravenous drug use. Toronto, Ottawa, Surrey, Winnipeg and other Canadian cities are not immune.

Drug prohibition increases

the rate of HIV infections. When illegal drugs are sold through the black market, the only concern is making money. There is no financial incentive for traffickers to provide drug education, counselling or harm reduction services such as sterile needles.

In addition, in parts of Canada it is common for an injection drug user to be arrested for a minor drug charge and end up with a court-imposed condition to abstain from possessing drug paraphernalia. Addicts are then forced to choose whether to carry sterile needles and risk a new criminal

For many of these addicts, part of their sentence will include a substantial risk of contracting HIV or Hepatitis C.

charge, or to share a needle with another addict who may already have a blood-borne disease.

The Vienna Declaration is particularly important within Canada. Bill S-10 is before Parliament. It is the federal government's third attempt in as many years to create mandatory minimum sentences for certain drug offences.

The wording of this legislation virtually guarantees that street-level drug addicts will find themselves going to jail for lengthy prison terms. This will do nothing but channel limited tax dollars away from health and education and into costly incarceration policies which will turn petty drug users into hardened criminals.

HIV prevention efforts will be hampered if this bill passes. The HIV infection rates in federal prisons are similar to some African countries, according to the statistics provided by the Correctional Service of Canada. So, for

many of these addicts, part of their sentence will include a substantial risk of contracting HIV or Hepatitis C.

Of course, the Vienna Declaration is not the first time a major initiative has been announced to coincide with the biannual International AIDS Conference. Ten years ago, the Durban Declaration stated a basic scientific truth: that HIV is the cause of AIDS. More than 5,000 scientists and medical doctors signed the document in an effort to confront AIDS denialism.

The main critic of the Durban Declaration was Thabo Mbeki, who was president of South Africa at the time. He believed, mistakenly, that there was a causal link between poverty and AIDS. In fact it is HIV that causes AIDS. His denials, rooted in ignorance and willful blindness, have cost many lives in South Africa.

Given this history, it will be interesting to see who opposes the Vienna Declaration. Police lobby groups have traditionally been the most vocal critics of drug policy reform. In this instance, however, they should choose their responses carefully. At stake is the very credibility of these organizations. They risk being remembered in the same light as President Mbeki, for it is clear that the new AIDS denialism is the failure to acknowledge the realities of HIV transmission.

The Vienna Declaration will play a significant role in HIV policy, and I am proud to have signed the document online at viennadeclaration.com.

I can only hope that my colleagues in law enforcement will be inspired to do the same.

David Bratzer is a member of the board of directors for Law Enforcement Against Prohibition and a police officer in British Columbia. The opinions expressed in this column do not represent the views of his employer.

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