

UN World Drug Report shows flourishing global drug market but remains silent on policy failures and human rights abuse

26 June 2020, LONDON. *Today, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) formally presents the [2020 World Drug Report](#), showing yet again that illegal drug markets are flourishing globally, despite continued harsh, repressive and damaging law enforcement measures. These tragic policy failures and their devastating impact on human rights are almost completely absent from the report. The International Drug Policy Consortium (IDPC), a global network of more than 195 NGOs, notes with concern that the UNODC is still unable to acknowledge the failure of decades of drug policies based on prohibition and punishment, and how these approaches fuel systemic human rights abuses such as racism, police violence and state-sponsored killing campaigns.*

The 2020 World Drug Report highlights the increasing complexity and expansion of the drug market, with cultivation and production remaining at record high levels. The number of people who use illegal drugs reached 269 million in 2018, representing a 30% rise since 2009. Crucially, only one in eight people with drug use problems had access to adequate drug treatment, and the number of drug-related deaths [recorded](#) in 2017 was 585,000. More than half of these deaths are preventable, as they stem from overdose and untreated hepatitis C.

This year's report includes a welcome focus on marginalised populations and notes that stigma, discrimination and social exclusion are the true drivers of the harms related to drug use. However, the UNODC blindly fails to acknowledge that it is precisely punitive policies such as the criminalisation of drug possession for personal use, that fuel stigma and exclusion, establishing nearly unsurmountable barriers to healthcare access, and undermining personal safety and life opportunities. This is despite a recent [consensus position](#) from across the UN system that promotes decriminalisation of drug use and possession for personal use.

The almost total lack of reference to the serious and ongoing human rights violations relating to drug control in the report is deeply concerning. Drug control drives mass incarceration across the globe with [1 in 5 people](#) imprisoned for largely minor drug offences. The numbers of extrajudicial and arbitrary killings committed against those suspected of involvement in drugs has also increased steadily in recent years with estimates of over [27,000 such deaths](#) in the Philippines alone. The use of the death penalty, forced drug treatment, arbitrary arrests and detention, police brutality and the [disproportionate impact](#) of these responses on communities of colour are all unremarked upon in the report.

Ann Fordham, IDPC's Executive Director said: 'Despite some welcome progress in broadening out the World Drug Report's narrative to include greater mention of marginalised communities, the UNODC's wilful omission of any analysis of the unmitigated human rights impacts of repressive drug control measures is indefensible. Just last week, the UN Human Rights Council [highlighted](#) systemic racism and policing. There is overwhelming evidence that drug laws have weaponised law enforcement against marginalised communities due to race and poverty across the globe.'

NOTES TO THE EDITOR

Key links and information:

- The **International Drug Policy Consortium** is a global network of 195+ NGOs that come together to promote an objective and open debate on national and international drug policies, and supports evidence-based policies that are effective at reducing harms. [More information](#).
- The **World Drug Report 2020** is [available here](#).
- The **UN System Common Position on drug-related matters** is available [here](#).
- **‘What we have learned over the last ten years: A summary of knowledge acquired and produced by the UN system on drug-related matters’** – a contribution published on 14 March 2019 from UN system coordination Task Team on the Implementation of the UN System Common Position on drug-related matters is [available here](#).
- **‘Taking stock: A decade of drug policy – A civil society shadow report’** is [available here](#).

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