

# Release

Drugs, The Law & Human Rights

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The Rt Hon David Cameron MP  
Prime Minister  
10 Downing Street  
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26 June 2014

Dear Prime Minister

Today is a Global Day of Action calling on world leaders to work together to achieve more effective drug policies and to end the criminalisation of people who use drugs. In more than 100 cities across the globe, people are coming together to highlight the failure of the 'War on Drugs' and the harms that it creates for individuals, their families and communities. As part of this action we, the signatories of this letter, call on the Government to review drug policy at both national and global levels, including a commitment to meaningful engagement at the UN General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on drugs in New York in 2016.

Nationally the use of criminal sanctions for the possession of drugs has led to the unnecessary criminalisation of more than 1.5 million people in the last 15 years. Even more alarming is the inequality of our drugs laws which have resulted in mostly the young, black and poor being the focus of drug law enforcement. In England and Wales black people are six times more likely to be stopped and searched for drug offences compared to white people and Asian people are twice as likely. This is despite the fact both groups use drugs at a lower rate than the white population.

The cost of drug law enforcement can be measured in both economic terms and social costs, where young people's opportunities are limited due to a criminal record and where there is evidence that exposure to the criminal justice system for low level possession offences can lead to an increased risk of recidivism.

The use of criminal sanctions does not deter drug use, and causes unnecessary harm. Evidence from other countries, including the Czech Republic, Portugal and Australia, demonstrates that when a non-criminal response is adopted, use of drugs does not increase and the significant harms associated with criminalisation, including HIV transmission, are dramatically reduced.

The global 'War on Drugs' also allows for significant human rights abuses. Thirty seven countries maintain the death penalty for drug offences on their statute books; in 12 of these, it is a mandatory punishment. Furthermore, in some countries people who use drugs are subject to forced detention. Added to this is the fact that the global war on drugs is driving the HIV/AIDS and hepatitis C pandemics among people who use drugs and their sexual partners. This situation must end.

Both nationally and internationally, calls for drug policy reform are growing stronger, with political leaders from countries at the forefront of the drugs war leading the way. Thanks to the courage of the Presidents of Colombia, Mexico and Guatemala, the UNGASS on Drugs will take place in 2016. It is these countries that have witnessed the highest levels of drug-related violence leading to hundreds of thousands of deaths. We must support them to end the cycle of brutality and destruction that results from the current drug control framework.

It is important that the UK fully engages in this process and works with other governments, civil society and impacted groups, to ensure that the opportunity in 2016 for a much needed honest and serious debate on the future of international drug control is seized.

In 2002, as a member of the Home Affairs Select Committee, you supported the recommendation that the then Labour Government "initiates a discussion within the Commission on Narcotic Drugs of alternative ways—including the possibility of legalisation and regulation—to tackle the global drugs dilemma". Now is the time to reaffirm this position. By committing to a review of national drug policy and pledging to support more effective approaches in the imminent UN debates, the UK Government will demonstrate its commitment to reducing the harms caused by drugs and current drug policies, and its desire to move towards an evidence-based approach.

Yours sincerely

## Individual Signatories:

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**DrugScope**

**FullyFocussed**

**Harm Reduction  
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**Health Poverty Action**

**Howard League for Penal  
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**Inquest**

**International Doctors For  
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**International Drug Policy  
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**International HIV/AIDS  
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**International Network of  
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**Kaleidoscope**

**Law Enforcement Against  
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**Million Youth Media**

**National AIDS Trust**

**National Black Police  
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**Prison Governors  
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**Substance Misuse  
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**Terrence Higgins Trust**

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