

**UN General Assembly Special Session on Drugs
June 8-10, 1998**

Public Letter to Kofi Annan

June 1, 1998

Mr. Kofi Annan
Secretary General
United Nations
New York, New York
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Dear Secretary General,

On the occasion of the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Drugs in New York on June 8-10, 1998, we seek your leadership in stimulating a frank and honest evaluation of global drug control efforts.

We are all deeply concerned about the threat that drugs pose to our children, our fellow citizens and our societies. There is no choice but to work together, both within our countries and across borders, to reduce the harms associated with drugs. The United Nations has a legitimate and important role to play in this regard -- but only if it is willing to ask and address tough questions about the success or failure of its efforts.

We believe that the global war on drugs is now causing more harm than drug abuse itself.

Every decade the United Nations adopts new international conventions, focused largely on criminalization and punishment, that restrict the ability of individual nations to devise effective solutions to local drug problems. Every year governments enact more punitive and costly drug control measures. Every day politicians endorse harsher new drug war strategies.

What is the result? U.N. agencies estimate the annual revenue generated by the illegal drug industry at \$400 billion, or the equivalent of roughly eight per cent of total international trade. This industry has empowered organized criminals, corrupted governments at all levels, eroded internal security, stimulated violence, and distorted both economic markets and moral values. These are the consequences not of drug use per se, but of decades of failed and futile drug war policies.

In many parts of the world, drug war politics impede public health efforts to stem the spread of HIV, hepatitis and other infectious diseases. Human rights are violated, environmental assaults perpetrated and prisons inundated with hundreds of thousands of drug law violators. Scarce resources better expended on health, education and economic development are squandered on ever more expensive

interdiction efforts. Realistic proposals to reduce drug-related crime, disease and death are abandoned in favor of rhetorical proposals to create drug-free societies.

Persisting in our current policies will only result in more drug abuse, more empowerment of drug markets and criminals, and more disease and suffering. Too often those who call for open debate, rigorous analysis of current policies, and serious consideration of alternatives are accused of "surrendering." But the true surrender is when fear and inertia combine to shut off debate, suppress critical analysis, and dismiss all alternatives to current policies. Mr. Secretary General, we appeal to you to initiate a truly open and honest dialogue regarding the future of global drug control policies - one in which fear, prejudice and punitive prohibitions yield to common sense, science, public health and human rights.

Sincerely,

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