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## UNODC Says World Drug Problem Contained, But Not Solved

[Media Advisory: Commission on Narcotic Drugs to Review Effectiveness of International Drug Control](#)

- [Mr. Costa's Remarks](#)
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Addressing the 51 st session of the United Nations [Commission on Narcotic Drugs](#) (CND), the Executive Director, United Nations *Office on Drugs and Crime* (UNODC), Antonio Maria Costa, has called for the international drug control regime to be made "fit for purpose for the 21 st century".

Mr. Costa admitted that "drug control has an image problem: too much drug-related crime; too many people in prisons, and too few in health services; too few resources for prevention treatment, and rehabilitation; too much eradication of drug crop, and not enough eradication of poverty".

However, what people fail to see are the accomplishments of drug control:

- Illicit drug use has been contained to less than 5 per cent of the world adult population, as opposed to 5 to 6 times this proportion for people addicted to tobacco or alcohol;
- There are no more than 25 million problem drug users - that's less than 0.5 per cent of the world population. There are more people affected by AIDS;
- Deaths due to drugs are limited to perhaps 200,000/year, namely 1/10 of those killed by alcohol and 1/20 of those killed by tobacco;
- Worldwide, drug cultivation has been slashed (with the obvious exception of Afghanistan where the issue is insurgency, more than narcotics);



**Mr. Antonio Maria Costa, UNODC Executive Director**

- Adherence to the international drug control regime is practically universal, with the principle of shared responsibility unanimously accepted;
- The regulatory system of production, distribution and use of drugs for medical purposes, functions well.

To move beyond merely containing the problem, the UNODC Executive Director underlined the need for a multilateral approach, and a stronger focus on health. "Scientific evidence shows that drug addiction is an illness that can and must be treated. There are no ideological debates about curing cancer or diabetes; left and right are not divided on the need for treating tuberculosis or HIV. So why are there political contrapositions about drugs?", he said.

As a priority, Mr. Costa urged Member States to prevent and treat drug abuse. At the same time, he underlined the importance of reaching the world's 25 million hardcore drug addicts in order to reduce the harm that they cause to themselves and to society.

He emphasized the need for more funding for development projects to give farmers an alternative to cannabis, coca, and opium: "the eradication of poverty must go hand-in-hand with the eradication of drug crops".

To move forward, the head of UNODC called for more security to help States that are caught in the cross-fire of drug trafficking, and to promote criminal justice to ensure that fighting drugs is based on the rule of law. He spoke out about human rights as a key aspect of drug control, urging States to give serious consideration to whether the imposition of capital punishment for drug-related crimes is best practice: "although drugs kill, I don't believe we need to kill because of drugs", he said.

He called for a grass-roots mobilization of society to help fight drug abuse, and urged civil society and media campaigns "to promote consumer boycotts against the fashion houses, recording companies, and sport enterprises that hire celebrities proud, rather than shameful, of their addiction".

The CND is the central policy-making body within the United Nations system dealing with illicit drugs. It is also the governing body for UNODC's work in the drugs field.

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For further information, please contact:

Mr. Walter Kemp  
Acting Spokesman, UNODC  
Telephone: (+43-1) 26060 5629  
Mobile: (+43-699) 1459-5629  
Email: [walter.kemp@unodc.org](mailto:walter.kemp@unodc.org)

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