

SUMMARY

Mailing action to ask for an amendment of the agenda of the EXPERT COMMITTEE ON DRUG DEPENDENCE 38th meeting.

From 4th to 11th November 2016, was proposed an **online advocacy action concerning the issue of the scheduling of cannabis and cannabis resin under the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs**, in regard to the **38th meeting of the Expert Committee on Drug Dependence (ECDD)** planned for 14th to 18th November of the same year.

The action was addressed to relevant scholars, stakeholders and representatives of civil society organizations, and consisted in a letter (see below) aimed at being sent to the World Health Organization's servants in charge of the ECDD secretariat and their hierarchy: **Margaret Chan** (Executive Director of the WHO), **Suzanne Hill** (Director, Essential medicines and health products, WHO), **Gilles Forte** (Coordinator, Medicines Programme Coordination, EMP, WHO) and **Eda Lopato** (Policy, Access and Use Unit, MPC, EMP, WHO).

The WHO's ECDD is the only organ responsible for **scientifically reviewing controlled substances**, and **emitting scheduling recommendations** regarding these to the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs. From **November 14th to 18th** took place 38th meeting that discussed the case of "**cannabis and cannabis resin**". While the Experts from the 2012, 2014 and 2015 Committees successively recommended that a "pre-review" of cannabis and cannabis resin be undertaken (the very first step of the evaluation process), the Secretariat of the ECDD surprisingly drafted an agenda that listed cannabis and cannabis resin only as an "update", a preliminary step that does not lead to the process of assessment and possible recommendation. Furthermore, the collection of data needed to start the process of pre-review is available, and as both the Experts and the common sense require it.

Stakeholders and organizations concerned by the need of grounding drug policies on science and evidences, and willing to participate, were asked to endorse this call by sending the letter to the WHO, requesting them to **amend the agenda of the 38th meeting of the ECDD and change the agenda item "Update of Cannabis and cannabis resin" for "Pre-review of Cannabis and cannabis resin"**. We consider that **nearly 80 persons applied** to this action. Among them, there were **59 who came back to us** to confirm their initiative. Relevant data from these feed-backs show:

- **15 Medical sciences scholars or Public health professionals** (from 9 countries) on behalf of relevant health-related organizations or Universities;
- **5 scholars and experts in Political sciences, Law and International law** (from 4 countries) on behalf of relevant public health policies-related organizations or Universities;
- **8 non-profit organizations of medical cannabis patients** (from 7 countries)
- **21 public interest non-governmental organizations** (from 11 countries);
- **7 business interest non-governmental organizations** (from 6 countries);
- and 3 individuals on their own name.

Among the organizations that sent the letter, one is in **official relation with the WHO**, and another is **recognized by the European Council**. and one person is an elected district-Mayor of Paris.

The geographical repartition of the endorsers that came back to us is as follows:

LATIN AMERICA & THE CARIBBEAN 10.3 %	NORTHERN AMERICA 15.4 %	EASTERN EUROPE 12 %	WESTERN EUROPE 54.4 %	MIDDLE EAST, ASIA & PACIFIC 6.9 %
BRAZIL (1)	CANADA (1)	CZECH REPUBLIC (4)	BELGIUM (4)	ISRAEL (1)
COLOMBIA (1)	UNITED STATES OF AMERICA (8)			FRANCE (8)
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO (1)		SLOVAKIA (1)		
SAINT LUCIA (1)		SLOVENIA (2)		
JAMAICA (1)				
URUGUAY (1)				
			GERMANY (2)	
		THE UNITED KINGDOM (2)		
		NORWAY (6)		
		SPAIN (8)		
		THE NETHERLANDS (1)		
		ITALY (1)		

The proposed letter to send was the following:

From:
Name, Occupation
Org./Univ.
City, Country.

To:
Margaret Chan,
Gilles Forte,
Suzanne Hill,
Eda Lopato.

In a few days, the Expert Committee on Drug Dependence, to which the World Health Organization handles the secretariat, will meet and discuss the case of "cannabis and cannabis resin". The Experts from the 2012, 2014 and 2015 panels successively recommended that a pre-review of cannabis and cannabis resin be undertaken.

I am however surprised to note that the provisional agenda of the 38th meeting of the Expert Committee on Drug Dependence⁽¹⁾ only lists cannabis and cannabis resin as an "Update", while this item was already on the agenda of last year's 37th meeting. Reiterating this preliminary step seems unnecessary, even more considering that the current scheduling of cannabis and cannabis resin dates 1935, and that the collection of data needed to start the process of pre-review is available.

Since that date, apart from the creation of the WHO, both the social context of cannabis use and the science of drug dependence have dramatically changed. Yet, cannabis and cannabis resin remain under the strictest control regime possible under the 1961 Single Convention on narcotic drugs, without any valid scientific re-assessment.

That current scheduling is in marked divergence with the Convention's principle that the scheduling of substances should be based on an adequate scientific assessment by the WHO. A treaty-mandated role that was recently reaffirmed in the outcome document of the Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly dedicated to the world drug problem⁽²⁾, who recalls to "enhance collaboration among Member States and the treaty bodies with scheduling responsibilities, leading to informed and coordinated scheduling decisions by the Commission on Narcotic Drugs that take due account of all relevant aspects to ensure that the objectives of the conventions are met."

Therefore, deeply concerned by the need of grounding the scheduling of substances on up-to-date and solid scientific evidences, I firmly request the World Health Organization to act in a responsible, transparent, unbiased and neutral way by amending the agenda of the 38th meeting of the Expert Committee on Drug Dependence and changing its agenda item "Update of Cannabis and cannabis resin" to "Pre-review of Cannabis and cannabis resin".

Please consider my best regards for the actions undertaken by the WHO on this issue and the crucial importance of your work,

yours sincerely.

(1) World Health Organization, 2016. 38th WHO Expert Committee on Drug Dependence. Annotated provisional agenda. Available from: http://www.who.int/entity/medicines/access/controlled-substances/38th_ECDD_Provisional_Agenda_WEB_04102016.pdf

(2) United Nations, 2016. Outcome document of the 30th Special Session of the General Assembly UN/A/S-30/L.1 "Our joint commitment to effectively addressing and countering the world drug problem". Available from: <http://www.un.org/Docs/journal/asp/ws.asp?m=A/RES/S-30/1>