



### Special United Nations Session on the World Drug Problem April 19-21 2016

- Human Rights Impacts
- Effective Drug Policies
- International Drug Control
- New Challenges

*The UN General Assembly held a Special Session (UNGASS) on The World Drug Problem. This Special Session was an important milestone in achieving the goals set in the policy document of 2009 "Political Declaration and Plan of Action on International Cooperation towards an Integrated and Balanced Strategy to Counter the World Drug Problem", which defined action to be taken by Member States as well as goals to be achieved by 2019.*

Dr. Jean LaCour represented ISAAC and NET Institute at the UN General Assembly Special Session on the "War on Drugs" in New York City in April 2016. Here are her thoughts:

Greetings everyone!

It's been an incredible week at the UN meetings. Many of the nations of the earth are expressing that it is time to care for addicts. Open discussion from member states that have decriminalized possession of small amounts of illicit drugs shared their realization based on significant research that documents a host of devastating unintended consequences from incarcerating millions of people for nonviolent drug related offences. This policy has been in effect for nearly fifty years.

#### **Making systems about People:**

Decades of the war on drugs has also been a war on people who are addicted, stigmatized, and often are people of color or ethnic groups who are impoverished and marginalized. In South America tens of thousands of poor women have been jailed with long sentences leaving their families in destitution with no source of support. These women are easy targets for drug enforcement agents who must fill quotas by apprehending "drug criminals." The work of apprehending members of criminal drug syndicates is dangerous and costly and does not yield results easily to fulfill quotas. Worldwide the war on drugs has overwhelmed criminal justice systems, including police, courts, prison facilities, and probation which are designed to deal with hardened crime.

Diseases like Hepatitis C, HIV Aids and Tuberculosis are spread inside prison populations who routinely experience trauma, violence and ongoing abuse of drugs. Many drug offenders leave the prison system less able to function in society and bring a hardened criminal mindset back to their own families and communities, as well as the infectious diseases mentioned above. Recidivism is high around the world.

#### **ISAAC International's Participation:**

In 2008, Franz Koopmans of De Hoop Foundation in The Netherlands and I each traveled to Vienna, Austria, where the UN Office of Drugs and Crime has its headquarters. I was invited to join the delegation of the WFTC, the World Federation of Therapeutic Communities representing hundreds

of residential treatment program worldwide. I sit on their Executive Board representing ISAAC, and you who make us ISAAC.

Franz and I were among 300+ NGOs invited to attend the special event to craft resolutions pertaining to Drug Policy from our perspective of human services. Most of the NGOs provided some type of Demand Reduction services including prevention, treatment, recovery services, prison outreaches, and care of the homeless, displaced families, or some level of social work or medical care for drug addicts, sex workers, street children, etc. Secular and faith based NGOs participated.

People representing the legalization of drugs were present; their position was that human rights inherently included the right of people to personally produce, possess and use illicit substances.

### **Supply reduction:**

In 2008, the Office of Drugs and Crime was very focused on Supply Reduction, including destruction of crops, policing international drug crime, border protection and inspections, interrupting smuggling and the diversion of pharmaceuticals, etc.

Our collective NGO Demand Reduction perspective sought to bring balance to the long standing emphasis on Supply Reduction. Our goal was to shift a measure of UN focus and funding to help deal with the resulting human devastation worldwide. Humanitarian efforts by thousands of groups of concerned people were left to deal with the casualties and effects of “The War” with no coordination or strategic overview or targeted funding.

My greatest take-away from the NGO event in Vienna was the stark realization that the voracious appetites of people in Western nations for illicit drugs like cocaine, opioids /heroin and marijuana drive the relentless demand that causes such immeasurable suffering in the developing world. International drug syndicates amass fortunes by turning poorer non-western nations into producer nations or transit nations in order to keep the citizens of Western nations amply supplied with their drugs of choice.

### **2012:**

Four years later, in 2012, I was again invited as an NGO to attend a symposium on Drugs and Crime at the UN headquarters in New York City. The impact of the World Drug Problem on Development was the entire focus. Again, I attended as part of the WFTC leaders group and represented ISAAC and NET Institute.

Substantial amounts of international foreign aid and UN funding intended to build infrastructure, provide social services, technical assistance, and stabilize economies, is diverted into fighting criminal drug syndicates that move into developing nations. The result is increased political corruption, diversion of development funds, violent extortion and abuse of citizenry, escalating addiction and extended human trafficking.

Legalization was presented in that meeting by its proponents as the most expedient policy for defeating the stronghold of international criminal drug syndicates. Drug trade that is legal and regulated would certainly put the criminal suppliers out of business according to their perspective.

Member states made official statements about addressing the Drug Trade as the single most critical factor destroying the prospects of economic progress or improving the quality of life in many developing nations worldwide.

By 2012, it seemed like the wealthy Western nations were counting the financial losses of their foreign aid investments and their failed attempts to improve the lot of their fellowman. They did not really address or calculate the cost of the river of suffering caused by addiction but they did understand the poor return on investment and the cost of lost opportunity in trying to help nations become active participants or trading partners within the first world's economic structures and policies.

### **UNGASS and the current overview:**

In 2016, I attended UNGASS representing ISAAC and my own organization called NET Institute Center for Addiction and Recovery Education which became associated officially with the UN Department of Public Information. For several years I had been hearing about UNGASS at international addiction conferences and events. I did not know what to expect but felt the weight of the seriousness of this event that would articulate the ongoing position and policies regarding The World Drug Problem.

I was amazed and grateful for the hundreds of people who came from all over the world. They released a huge wave of compassion for the suffering of people in poverty, in prison, and bound in addiction.

The General Assembly, Policy Roundtables, side events and official statements reiterated the need for prevention efforts and for treatment, instead of prison, for nonviolent drug offences. And retargeting financial resources to deter the multinational crime syndicates.

Policy makers and government representatives from the WHO, World Health Organization, the UN Office of Drugs and Crime, the US Office of Drug Policy, the US State Department, and others spoke of the need for treatment not incarceration. Representatives of governments of Mexico, Czech Republic, and others addressed the need for prevention and treatment and the negative outcomes of imprisonment.

There was recognition of the devastating role of multinational crime syndicates that amass incredible fortunes through money laundering which undermines legitimate finance and banking systems and also breeds corruption, destroys development and thwarts human progress worldwide.

The only people I heard personally promoting legalization of current illicit drugs were North American college students supporting "sane drug policy" that emphasized treatment not prison and the right of individuals to use mind expanding drugs for "personal and global enlightenment." Their energy was directed at expanding the legalization of marijuana in more jurisdictions in Canada and the US. Currently the states of Washington and Colorado, have already surpassed previous liberalization experiments in the Netherlands and elsewhere.

"The horses are already out of the barn" in terms of several US state governments. Huge financial interests are spending exorbitant funds to influence public support for a new marijuana industry paralleling "Big Tobacco." These tobacco companies have defied efforts to curtail their sale and promotion of highly addictive products that attract youth and are a leading cause of painful disease and death worldwide. Investors and companies are laying out the next juggernaut of "Big Marijuana" using the same formula for profits at the expense of countless youth and adults swept up in the myth of a new 'harmless' drug.

It was good to see members of ISAAC from Peru and from Bosnia. Leaders I met from Romania were very familiar with the wonderful work of De Hoop Foundation in their country. WFAD leaders were there, the World Federation Against Drugs from Sweden. ISAAC is a member of WFAD and the WFTC, the World Federation of Therapeutic Communities who had several leaders in attendance.

I also met two people from Myanmar and invited them to attend our Third ISAAC Asian conference in October, 2016. We all appreciate the able leadership of our Austral Asia Hub led by Warwick Murphy, Pax Tan and Kenneth Wong who have joyously mobilized our efforts in that powerful region.

In closing, let me say that it is an honor to serve the members of ISAAC as your president. It is a role I value highly as I represent each of you and tell others about the unparalleled contribution of Christian drug programs and other life giving services worldwide. I advocate for our right to provide both clinical and nonclinical faith based addiction recovery care across the globe.

Above all, please know, I give thanks for you! God sees your love and your labor! You share His plan to transform the lost and broken people on earth into the deeply loved and beautiful saints of His Kingdom.

May the Lord bless you and Keep you (protect you, sustain and guard you);  
May the Lord make His face to shine upon you (with favor).  
And be gracious to you (surrounding you with lovingkindness);  
The Lord lift of His face upon you (with divine approval),  
And give you peace (a tranquil heart and life).

Numbers 6:24-26