



Research Report

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Establishing an International Drug Control
System

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Introduction

The issue of establishing an international drug control system remains an urgent and extremely complex challenge that spans the intersections of public health, human rights, and global security. In the timeline of human history, the use of drugs has contributed to the diversity of societies via cultural and medicinal practices. However, the unauthorized proliferation and illicit trade of narcotics in contemporary times have evolved into a daunting threat, pushing forward the need for international cooperation and a comprehensive response.

The consequences of inadequate drug control can be seen from personal individual experiences to a global scale, shaping the fabric of societies worldwide. Public health, a cornerstone of societal well-being, bears the baggage of unchecked drug misuse. From the opioid epidemic in North America to the challenges posed by synthetic substances regionally, the toll on human health is stark. Addiction, overdosing, and unsanitary methods of practice leading to the spread of infectious diseases among vulnerable populations underscore the tangible effects of insufficient control measures.

The erosion of the rule of law is another critical factor of the issue. Illicit drug trafficking perpetuates a cycle of violence and corruption, compromising the integrity of governance structures in affected regions, and globally affects structures such as International Law. The nexus between drug cartels and organized crime networks undermines the very foundations of stable societies, perpetuating a cycle of instability that hampers socio-economic development.

Establishing an international drug control system demands an approach that extends beyond mere regulation. Legal and regulatory measures must harmonize across borders, creating a robust framework to control the production, distribution, and consumption of controlled substances. Cooperation at the international level is of prime importance, recognizing that the interconnectedness of global trade and communication requires collaborative efforts to address the transnational nature of the issue.

Respecting human rights and upholding principles of justice are non-negotiable components of this international framework. Individuals and communities affected by drug-related challenges must not bear the brunt of punitive measures. Instead, the system should prioritize rehabilitation, education, and community-based interventions, aligning with a human based and ethical approach.

The urgency of fostering a collective commitment to effective drug control measures cannot be overstated. SKYMUN23 will be where the fusion of diverse perspectives and collective determination can discuss the foundation of a more resilient and compassionate global response to the challenges posed by the global drug trade.

Definitions of Key Terms

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Key Term : Controlled Substances

These are drugs/ other substances that are regulated by the government due to their potential for harm (abuse or addiction). Not all Controlled Substances are equal, therefore based on their level of risk, they are categorized into different classes

Key term : Illicit Drug trafficking

The illegal trade, production, distribution, and sale of drugs. This involves the movement of controlled substances across borders or within a country without proper authorization.

Key term : Public Health impact

This describes the effects that drugs can have on the health and wellbeing of a population. It includes considerations of physical, mental, and social well-being, and can refer to both the positive and negative consequences of drug use.

Key term : Rule of Law

The rule of law emphasizes that all individuals and institutions including those who are in authority are not only bound by the law but must follow it. It ensures fairness, justice, and accountability within a society.

Key term : Criminal Enterprises

These are organized crime groups or syndicates that engage in illegal activities, including but not limited to drug trafficking

Key term : Legal and Regulatory Measures

These are laws, policies, and actions taken by governments and international bodies to control and regulate the various aspects of illegal substances, including drug production, distribution, and consumption.

Key term : Human Rights

These are fundamental rights and freedoms that every person is entitled to, regardless of nationality, race, religion, gender, or other characteristics. They include rights such as the right to life, liberty, and security. They can be positive, meaning they have to be government enforced, or negative meaning without government interference.

General overview

The establishment of an international drug control system is an intricate and continually evolving web, deeply intertwined with the intersections of public health, societal norms, economic structures, and international relations.

The roots of international drug control can be traced to the early 20th century when concerns about the impact of unregulated substances on public health and social order led to the start of the initiation of global efforts. *The International Opium Convention of 1912*, followed by the *Single Convention on*

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Narcotic Drugs of 1961, marked pivotal moments in the development of an international framework to govern the production, distribution, and use of controlled substances.

As the 20th century progressed, the emergence of new psychoactive substances and evolving drug markets necessitated the adaptation of international agreements. *The 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances* and the *1988 United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances* expanded the regulatory scope to address emerging challenges in the drug landscape.

In the contemporary era, the international drug control landscape is characterized by a complex interplay of factors, including the persistence of the illicit drug trade, the emergence of synthetic substances, and the evolving strategies of transnational criminal organizations. The need for a coordinated global response is underscored by the interconnectedness of drug-related challenges, requiring countries to navigate complex issues such as transborder trafficking, demand reduction, and harm minimization. Drug related issues cross borders, showing the need for utmost importance to address the issue.

International organizations, particularly the *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)* and the *World Health Organization (WHO)*, play pivotal roles in coordinating efforts, providing technical assistance, and fostering collaboration among member states. Despite these efforts, the dynamic nature of the drug trade demands continuous adaptation and innovation in policies and strategies.

The consequences of the international drug trade extend far beyond the abstract realm of policy discussions, impacting specific areas, countries, cultures, and organizations in diverse and profound ways.

There have been severe **Public Health Implications**, such as high rates of addiction. The misuse of controlled substances contributes to high rates of addiction, with significant public health implications ranging from mental health concerns to increased mortality. This also leads to the spread of infectious diseases, as drug use, particularly intravenous drug use, contributes to the spread of infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C.

Economic Impacts likewise range far and wide. There has been a strain on national economies; countries with significant drug production or trafficking activities often experience economic strain. This is due to the diversion of resources towards law enforcement efforts and the social costs of addiction. The issues of corruption and instability are also imperative, as the economic incentives associated with the drug trade can contribute to corruption within governments and exacerbate political instability.

Cultural and Social Dynamics changing should not be ignored either. Drug control measures may clash with cultural traditions and societal norms, leading to tensions between global norms and local values. Individuals and communities associated with drug use may face stigmatization and discrimination, impacting social cohesion.

Globally, anyone is at risk of getting impacted, this shows **Human Rights Implications**:

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Draconian drug policies, often characterized by harsh penalties, contribute to mass incarceration, raising concerns about the infringement of human rights and due process.

Alongside this, vulnerable and marginalized communities often bear the brunt of drug-related consequences, exacerbating existing social inequalities.

Lastly, this has an **Impact on Organized Crime**. The illicit drug trade serves as a lucrative source of income for organized criminal networks, empowering them and contributing to violence and instability in affected regions. Transnational criminal organizations exploit weaknesses in governance structures, utilizing sophisticated networks that span multiple countries.

Portugal's paradigm-shifting decision to decriminalize the possession and use of small quantities of controlled substances in 2001 offers a unique case study. This innovative model prioritized public health over harsh punitive measures, offering a nuanced alternative to traditional approaches. Individuals found in possession are redirected to a *Dissuasion Commission*, emphasizing education, treatment, and community service rather than criminalization. **Portugal's** experience serves as a beacon of a holistic approach to drug policy, showcasing positive outcomes such as reduced drug-related deaths, lower HIV transmission rates, and a shift towards a more compassionate and health-centered perspective. However, ongoing debates persist about the scalability and adaptability of this model to diverse cultural and legal contexts.

Despite decades of international collaboration and policy development, challenges persist in establishing an effective and equitable international drug control system.

International cooperation is not as applicable as on paper, causing policy disparities. Countries continue to adopt varying approaches to drug control, from punitive measures to harm reduction strategies, highlighting the challenge of harmonizing these policies on a global scale. The increasing trend towards legalization and decriminalization in certain countries raises questions about the coexistence of diverse drug policies on the international stage, bringing up questions of cultural relativism and realism.

The emergence of New **Psychoactive Substances** (NPS), such as cannabis, cocaine, MDMA, and LSD raise concerns, as they are marketed as 'safer' drugs despite often harsher realities. The constant development and distribution of NPS pose significant challenges to regulatory frameworks, often outpacing legislative responses and leading to uncertainties in enforcement efforts.

Human Rights Concerns also persist. Draconian drug policies have been associated with human rights abuses, prompting ethical considerations about the balance between public safety and individual freedoms. The disproportionate impact on vulnerable populations, including racial and ethnic minorities, highlights the need for human rights-centered approaches to drug control.

Furthermore, **Global Inequality** continues to worsen. The burden of drug-related consequences disproportionately falls on developing countries, exacerbating existing inequalities in access to resources and opportunities. Developing countries often face resource disparities in implementing effective drug control measures, further contributing to global inequality.

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A need for **Comprehensive Approaches** must take place. The complexity of social, economic, and health factors demands holistic and evidence-based approaches to drug control, emphasizing prevention, treatment, and harm reduction. Policies need to adapt to the evolving nature of the drug trade, necessitating innovative and flexible strategies that address the root causes of substance misuse.

Major parties involved

1. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

The UNODC is highly involved in coordinating and promoting international efforts to combat drug-related challenges. It provides technical assistance, conducts research, and facilitates collaboration among member states.

UNODC <https://www.unodc.org/>

2. World Health Organization (WHO)

The WHO plays a crucial role in drug control by providing guidance on the medical and scientific aspects of controlled substances. It assesses the potential for abuse and dependence of various drugs and recommends their scheduling.

WHO - Substance Abuse https://www.who.int/substance_abuse/en/

3. International Narcotics Control Board (INCB)

As an independent UN body, the INCB monitors the implementation of international drug control treaties and assesses the compliance of member states with their obligations.

INCB <https://www.incb.org/>

4. Interpol

Interpol facilitates international police cooperation and information exchange to combat transnational drug trafficking and related crimes.

Interpol - Drugs <https://www.interpol.int/en/Crimes/Drug-trafficking>

5. National Governments - Various Countries

National governments play a crucial role in implementing and enforcing drug control policies within their borders. They contribute to international efforts through collaboration and adherence to global conventions.

U.S. Office of National Drug Control Policy: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/ondcp/>

6. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

NGOs contribute to the discussion by advocating for evidence-based drug policies, promoting harm reduction strategies, and providing support to individuals affected by substance misuse.

Drug Policy Alliance <https://www.drugpolicy.org/>

7. European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA)

The EMCDDA provides data, information, and analysis on drug-related issues, supporting evidence-based policymaking at the European Union level.

EMCDDA <https://www.emcdda.europa.eu/>

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8. United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)

The UNGA addresses drug control at the global level, with member states participating in discussions, negotiations, and the adoption of resolutions to shape international drug policy.

UNGA <https://www.un.org/en/ga/>

9. International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)

Organizations like IFRC are involved in addressing the public health aspects of drug misuse, offering support and assistance to affected communities.

IFRC <https://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/>

10. Civil Society Organizations

Various civil society organizations contribute by raising awareness, advocating for human rights in drug policy, and engaging in dialogue to shape more compassionate and effective approaches.

Example: Transform Drug Policy Foundation <https://transformdrugs.org/>

Timeline of Key Events

1912: The International Opium Convention is signed in The Hague, marking the first international attempt to regulate the production and distribution of opium.

1925: The Geneva International Opium Convention is signed, further regulating the international trade of opium and its derivatives.

1931: The Convention for Limiting the Manufacture and Regulating the Distribution of Narcotic Drugs is signed in Geneva, establishing more stringent controls on the production and distribution of narcotics.

1948: The United Nations establishes the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) to oversee the implementation of international drug control treaties.

1961: The Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs is adopted, providing a comprehensive framework for the regulation of narcotic substances and establishing the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB).

1971: The Convention on Psychotropic Substances is signed in Vienna, extending control measures to include a broader range of substances with psychotropic effects.

1988: The United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances is adopted, addressing the transnational aspects of drug control and introducing measures to combat money laundering.

1998: The United Nations General Assembly holds a Special Session (UNGASS) on the world drug problem, aiming to review and evaluate global drug control efforts.

2001: Portugal decriminalizes the possession and use of small quantities of drugs, shifting the focus from criminalization to public health and treatment.

2013: Uruguay becomes the first country to fully legalize the production, distribution, and consumption of cannabis for recreational use.

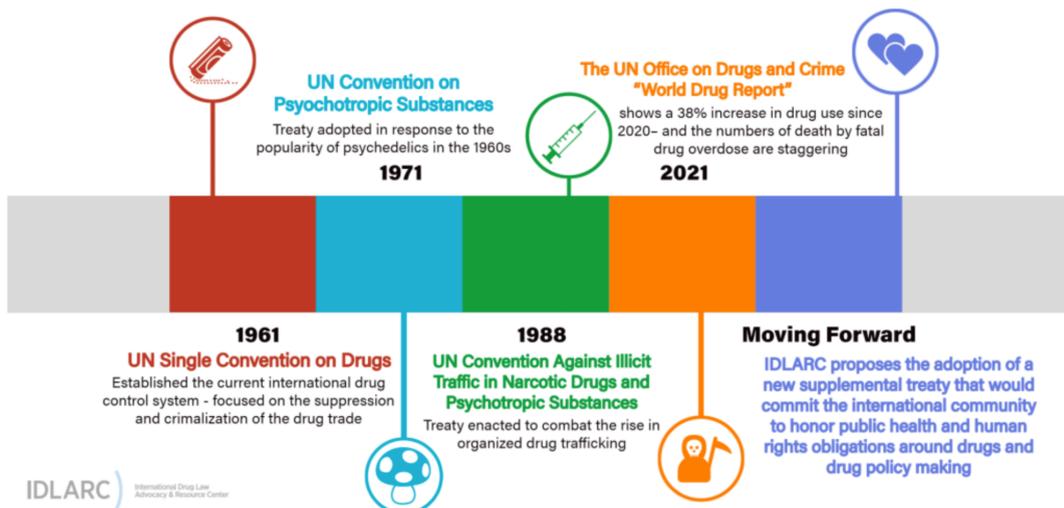
2016: The United Nations holds another Special Session on Drugs (UNGASS), focusing on the implementation of the outcomes of the 1998 Special Session and addressing new challenges in drug control.

2018: Canada legalizes the recreational use of cannabis, becoming the second country in the world to do so after Uruguay.

2020: The COVID-19 pandemic highlights the vulnerabilities and challenges in global drug supply chains and exacerbates existing issues related to drug misuse and addiction.

Previous attempts to solve the issue

Figure 1: Historical Precedent for “supplemental treaties” within the drugs arena



United Nations and International Organizations:

1. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC):

The UNODC is a key agency responsible for promoting international drug control efforts. It provides technical assistance, conducts research, and facilitates cooperation among member states to combat drug-related challenges.

2. World Health Organization (WHO):

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The WHO plays a critical role in drug control by providing guidance on the medical and scientific aspects of controlled substances. It assesses the potential for abuse and dependence of various drugs and recommends their scheduling.

International Drug Control Conventions:

1. Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs (1961):

This landmark international treaty established a comprehensive framework for the regulation of narcotic drugs. It categorized substances into different schedules based on their potential for abuse and medical utility.

2. Convention on Psychotropic Substances (1971):

This convention expanded the scope of international drug control to include psychotropic substances (e.g., hallucinogens, stimulants, and sedatives) and provided a framework for their regulation.

3. United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (1988):

This convention addressed the transnational aspects of drug control by establishing measures to combat illicit production, trafficking, and money laundering related to controlled substances.

Country-Specific Efforts:

1. Portugal - Drug Decriminalization (2001):

Portugal's decision to decriminalize the possession and use of small quantities of controlled substances was a pioneering move. This approach shifted the focus from punitive measures to a public health-centered strategy. Individuals found in possession of small amounts of drugs are referred to a Dissuasion Commission, which assesses their situation and recommends appropriate interventions, such as education, treatment, or community service.

Effectiveness of the Model: While Portugal's approach has shown positive outcomes, ongoing assessment and evaluation are essential to ensure its continued effectiveness and adaptability to changing drug trends.

Stigmatization and Marginalization: Despite the decriminalization policy, individuals struggling with substance use disorders may still face stigma and marginalization, highlighting the need for comprehensive support systems.

2. The Netherlands - Harm Reduction and Tolerance Policies:

The Netherlands has implemented a harm reduction approach, including supervised consumption facilities and needle exchange programs. Additionally, the country's policy of tolerance towards the personal use of cannabis aims to minimize harm associated with drug use.

Balancing Regulation and Control: Striking a balance between harm reduction measures and preventing potential negative consequences, such as drug tourism (campaigns against british tourists) and public health concerns, remains a continuous challenge.

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International Legal Framework: The Netherlands' approach sometimes conflicts with international drug control conventions, highlighting the tension between national policy and international obligations.

3. Switzerland - Heroin-Assisted Treatment (HAT):

Switzerland pioneered heroin-assisted treatment programs, offering pharmaceutical-grade heroin to individuals with severe opioid addiction under medical supervision. This approach has shown positive outcomes in reducing harm and improving health.

Access and Availability: Ensuring equitable access to heroin-assisted treatment and expanding the program to meet the needs of a broader population remains a challenge.

Public Perception and Stigma: Overcoming societal stigma and misconceptions associated with heroin-assisted treatment is crucial for its continued success and expansion.

4. Uruguay - Legalization of Cannabis (2013):

Uruguay became the first country to fully legalize the production, distribution, and consumption of cannabis for recreational use. This regulatory framework aims to reduce illicit market activities and promote public health.

Regulatory Implementation: Ensuring effective regulation and oversight of the legalized cannabis market, including quality control and taxation, is an ongoing challenge.

International Legal Implications: Uruguay's move to legalize cannabis faced international legal scrutiny and sparked discussions about the tension between national sovereignty and international drug control treaties.

5. United States - Opioid Epidemic Response:

In response to the opioid epidemic, the U.S. has implemented a range of strategies, including expanding access to opioid overdose reversal medications, enhancing prescription monitoring programs, and supporting addiction treatment services.

Access to Treatment: Ensuring that individuals struggling with opioid addiction have timely access to evidence-based treatment options remains a persistent challenge, particularly in underserved communities.

Addressing Root Causes: Tackling the underlying factors contributing to the opioid epidemic, such as economic disparities and lack of mental health resources, requires sustained efforts and multi-sectoral collaboration.

Challenges and Ongoing Issues:

There is **Limited International Coordination**. Despite international efforts, coordination and cooperation among countries remain challenging, with differing approaches to drug control policies and enforcement.

A **Emerging Synthetic Drugs** is occurring globally. The rapid emergence of new psychoactive substances (NPS) and synthetic drugs presents a persistent challenge for regulators and law enforcement agencies.

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Human Rights Concerns face the forefront of the issue. Some drug control measures have raised concerns about potential human rights abuses, particularly in cases where punitive measures are applied disproportionately or lead to incarceration without access to due process.

Lastly, **Access to Essential Medications** while also monitoring illegal substances has posed a challenge. Striking a balance between controlling the illicit use of certain substances and ensuring access to essential medications for pain management and other medical purposes remains a complex issue.

Possible solutions

1. Prevention and Education Programs:

Public Health Emphasis: Prioritize comprehensive drug education programs that emphasize the risks and consequences of drug misuse, tailored to different age groups and demographics.

Collaboration with Educational Institutions: Foster partnerships between governments, NGOs, and educational institutions to develop evidence-based curricula on drug prevention and awareness.

2. Harm Reduction and Treatment Initiatives:

Medicalized Approaches: Expand access to evidence-based treatment modalities, including medication-assisted treatment (MAT) and supervised consumption facilities, to address addiction as a public health issue.

Needle Exchange Programs: Implement and support harm reduction strategies, such as needle exchange programs, to reduce the spread of infectious diseases among injection drug users.

3. Decriminalization and Regulation:

Portugal's Model: Consider adopting a decriminalization approach similar to Portugal, where the focus shifts from punitive measures to a public health-centered strategy, with an emphasis on treatment and support.

Regulation of Certain Substances: Explore the possibility of regulating and monitoring the production and distribution of specific substances to mitigate the risks associated with illicit trade.

4. Cross-Border Cooperation and Intelligence Sharing:

Interpol and Regional Task Forces: Strengthen international law enforcement cooperation through organizations like Interpol and establish regional task forces dedicated to combating transnational drug trafficking networks.

Intelligence Exchange Platforms: Develop secure platforms for the sharing of intelligence and information among countries to enhance detection and interception efforts.

5. Alternative Livelihoods for Producing Regions:

Crop Substitution Programs: Implement sustainable development initiatives in regions dependent on illicit drug production, offering farmers viable alternatives through crop substitution programs and economic diversification.

Eco-Friendly Alternatives: Promote environmentally sustainable livelihoods, such as ecotourism or sustainable agriculture, to reduce the economic incentive for illegal drug cultivation.

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6. Technological Solutions and Data Analytics:

Blockchain and Traceability: Leverage blockchain technology and supply chain traceability to monitor and regulate the production and distribution of controlled substances, reducing opportunities for diversion.

Predictive Analytics for Law Enforcement: Utilize data-driven approaches to identify patterns and trends in drug trafficking, enabling law enforcement agencies to allocate resources more effectively.

7. International Diplomacy and Policy Coordination:

Multilateral Agreements: Strengthen international agreements and conventions to enhance cooperation, mutual assistance, and extradition procedures for drug-related offenses.

Policy Harmonization: Encourage harmonization of drug policies among countries, aligning legal frameworks and enforcement efforts to create a more unified global approach. (e.g. UN frameworks)

8. Capacity Building and Technical Assistance:

Training and Skill Development: Provide training and technical assistance to law enforcement agencies, border control personnel, and judicial systems to enhance their capacity to combat drug-related crimes effectively.

Support for Developing Countries: Allocate resources and expertise to assist developing countries in strengthening their regulatory and enforcement capacities.

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