

Setting the scene: International context

1st September 2025

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A global grassroots-up movement for reform

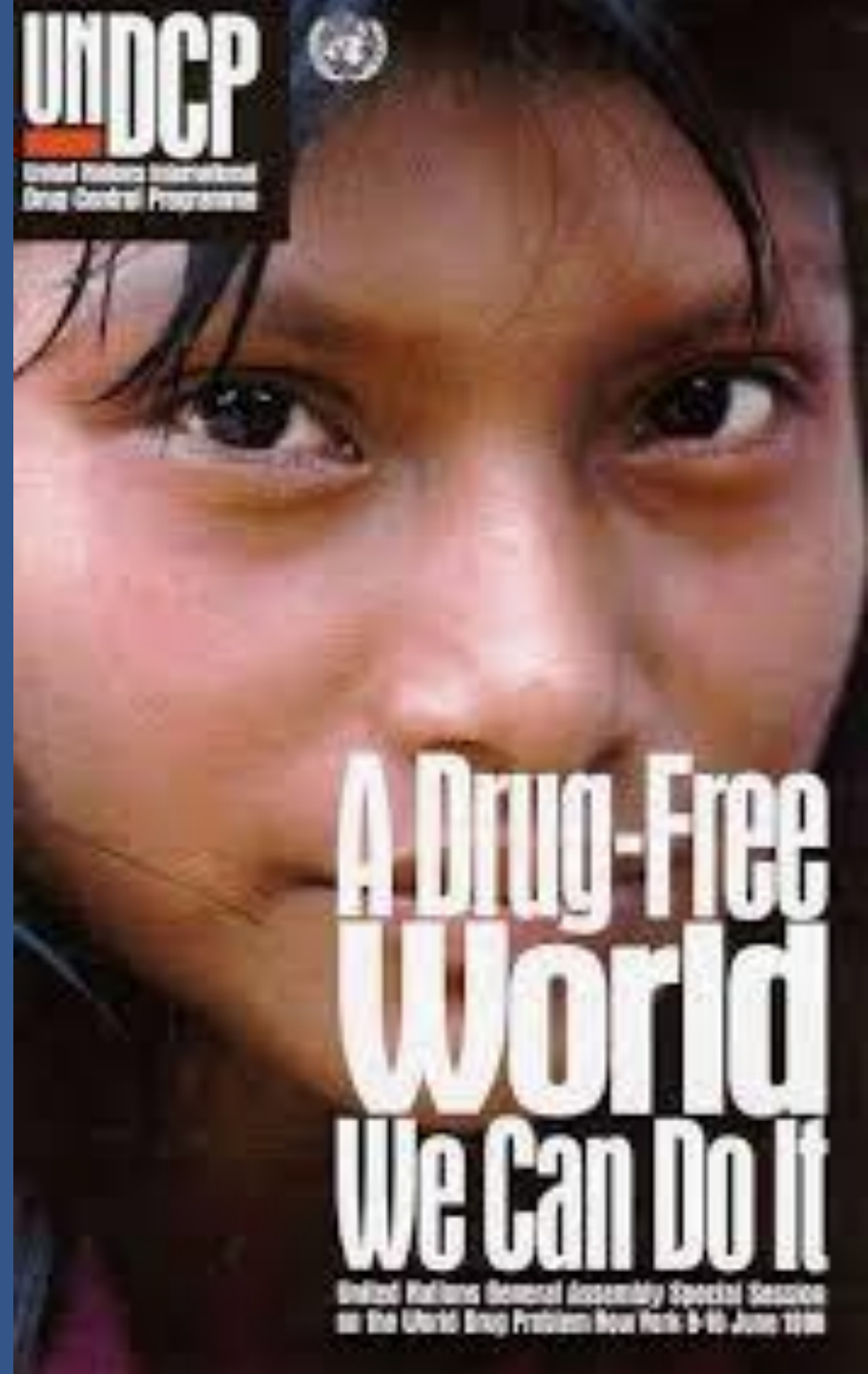
- IDPC: Network of 190+ CSOs promoting for **drug policies grounded in human rights and social justice**
- We are proud to be part of a **global movement** that includes communities, experts, and services
- Support Don't Punish Global Day of Action is held on 26 June (World Drug Day). In 2025, events in over **280 cities & 80 countries!**



Why the global context matters

A global regime that exerts huge normative pressure

- 1961 UN Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs
- 1971 UN Convention on Psychotropic Substances
- 1988 UN Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances
- Almost universally ratified
- Stated objective: to protect the “health and welfare of mankind”
 - Prohibit supply and demand of drugs for non-medical purposes
 - Promote access for scientific and medical purposes
- **VIENNA CONSENSUS**

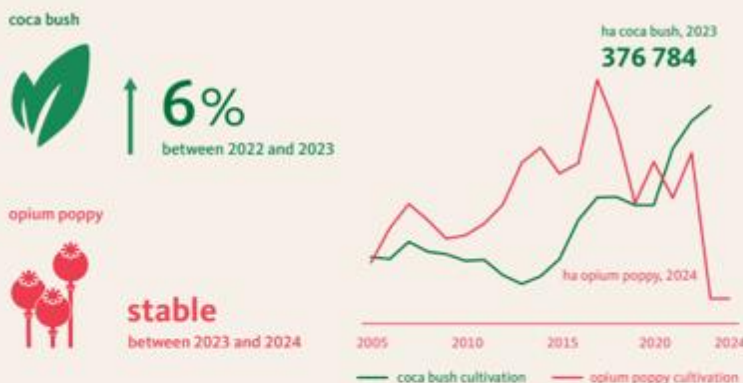


An admission of failure

Key figures a
glance, Cultivation
and Production

World Drug Report
2025, UNODC

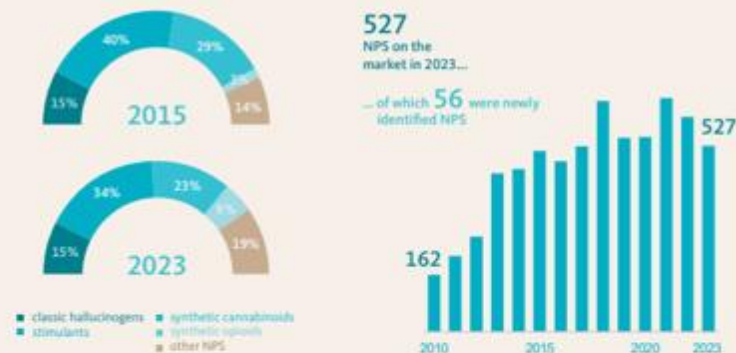
Global cultivation



Global production



New psychoactive substances (NPS) on the global market



Trends in quantity of drugs seized



Global quantities of drugs seized, 2023



Source: UNODC,
World Drug Report,
2025

People who use drugs, 2023

316
million people

↑ 28%
over 10 years



cannabis

244
million



opioids

61
million



amphetamines

31
million



cocaine

25
million



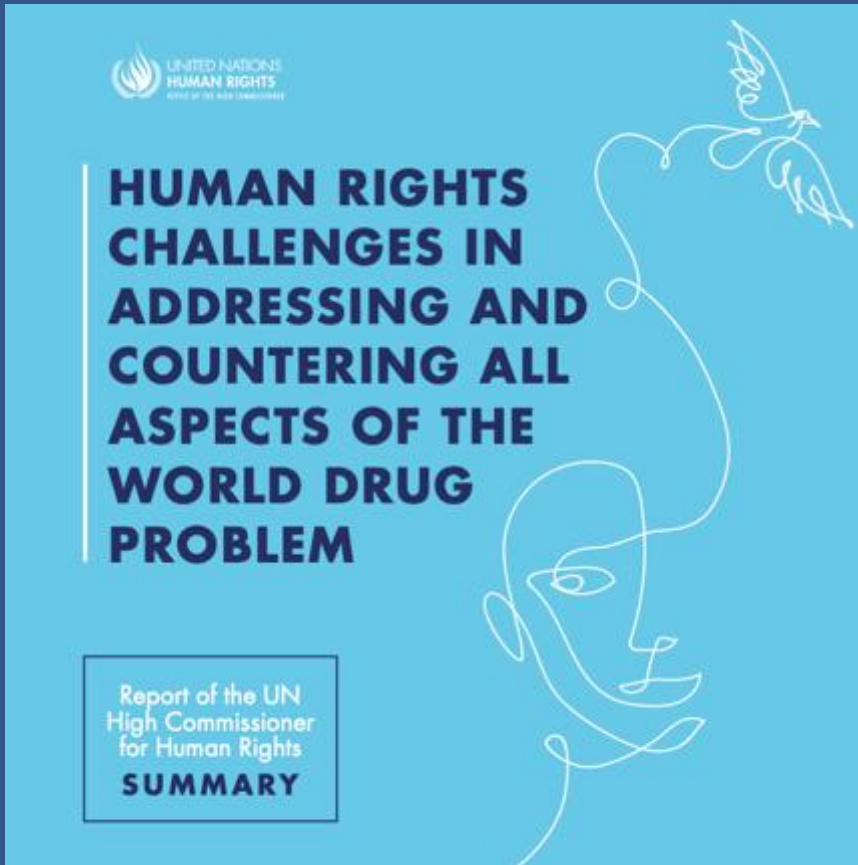
"ecstasy"

21
million



The impacts of punitive drug control

Widespread human rights abuses



- Lack of, and unequal access to, harm reduction and drug dependence treatment services
- Mass incarceration
- Militarisation of drug policy
- Disproportionate impacts on women, children and youth, people of African descent, Indigenous Peoples
- Environmental impacts

A human rights disaster

Incarceration

1 in 5
prisoners worldwide
are incarcerated for
drug offences



In some parts of the world,
over 80% of women
incarcerated are serving
sentences for drug-related
offences.



Death penalty

3,113

people have been executed for drug
offences over the past decade

33 jurisdictions retain the death
penalty for drug-related crimes



A crisis of pain...

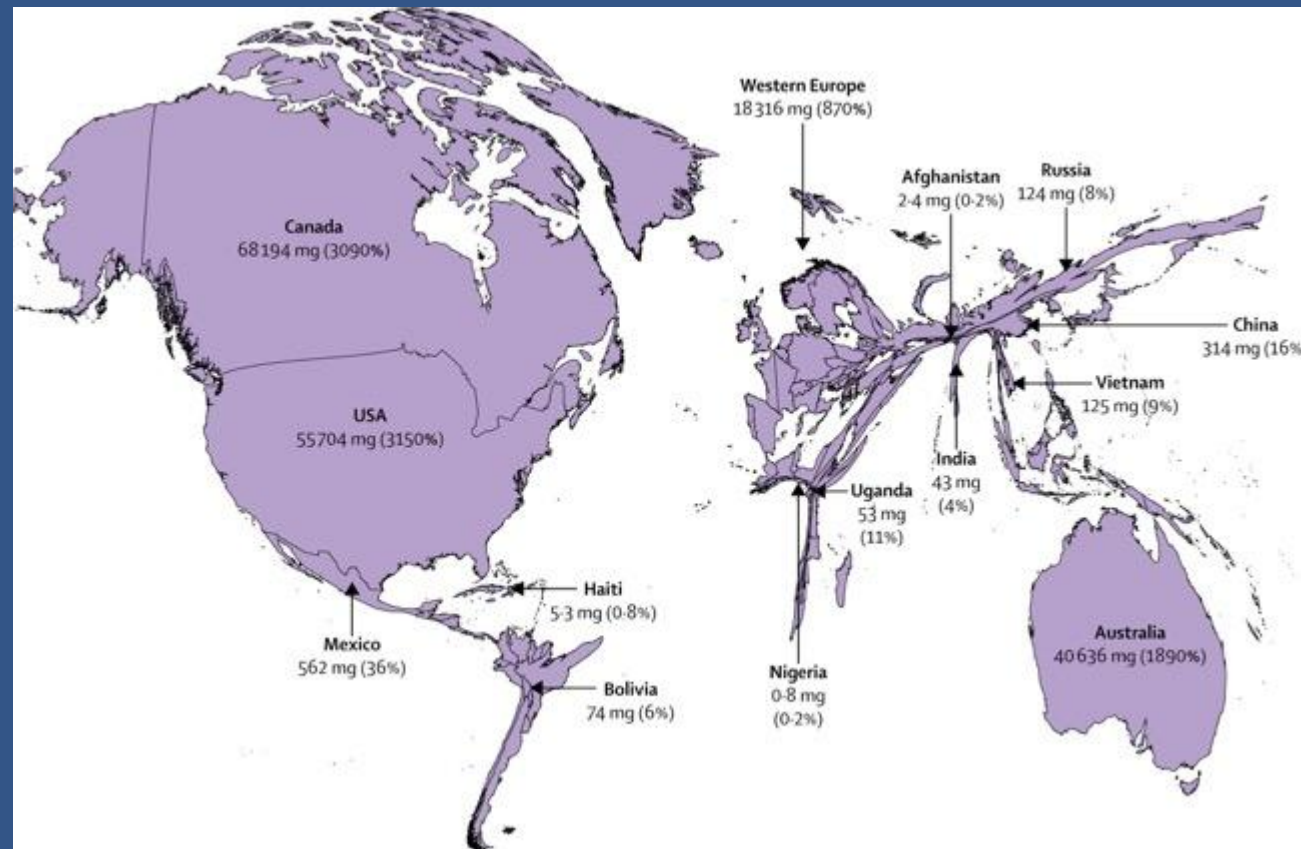


82% of the world
uses **less than 17%** of all
morphine-based medicines

While 83% of the world's morphine
is used in high-income countries



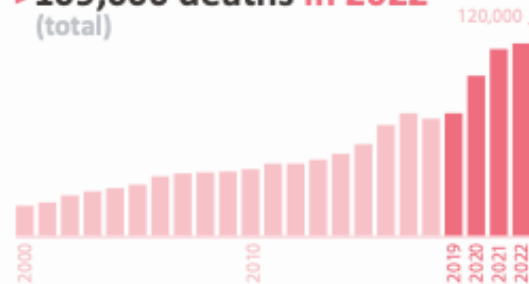
Credit: Alan Fernandez Ochoa



A deepening crisis of prohibition

North America's Drug deaths catastrophe

United states:
>109,000 deaths in 2022
(total)



Canada:
7,328 deaths in 2022
(opioid-related)



Heightened risks to Blood-borne viruses



**Global prevalence among
people who inject drugs**

People who use drugs living with:
Hepatitis C: 6.6 million (+14%)
HIV: 1.6 million (+17%)

(WDR 2023 | % increase from WDR2019 data)

Unmet agreements International norms & guidance

Housing, food,
clothing, care...

~Universal
HR Declaration

Decriminalisation

~UNGASS2016

Harm reduction

~HR & DP Guidelines

Treatment

~UN Common

Community
leadership

Position on Drugs
~WHO 'Comprehensive
package'

Traditional
medicines

~OHCHR reports

+ etc!

~Global AIDS Strategy

~UNDRIIP

No more
prisons

Reparations

Safe
supply

Drug
consumption
rooms

Clear demands

from communities, civil society, academia

Source: 'Off Track',
IDPC shadow report,
December 2023

Multiple crises converging

- Global drug control increasingly being recognised as an ineffective system that is not working for many Member States
- US (and other) aid cuts disrupt life-saving health services around the world
- UN funding and values under threat
- Geopolitical disruption reshaping political alliances



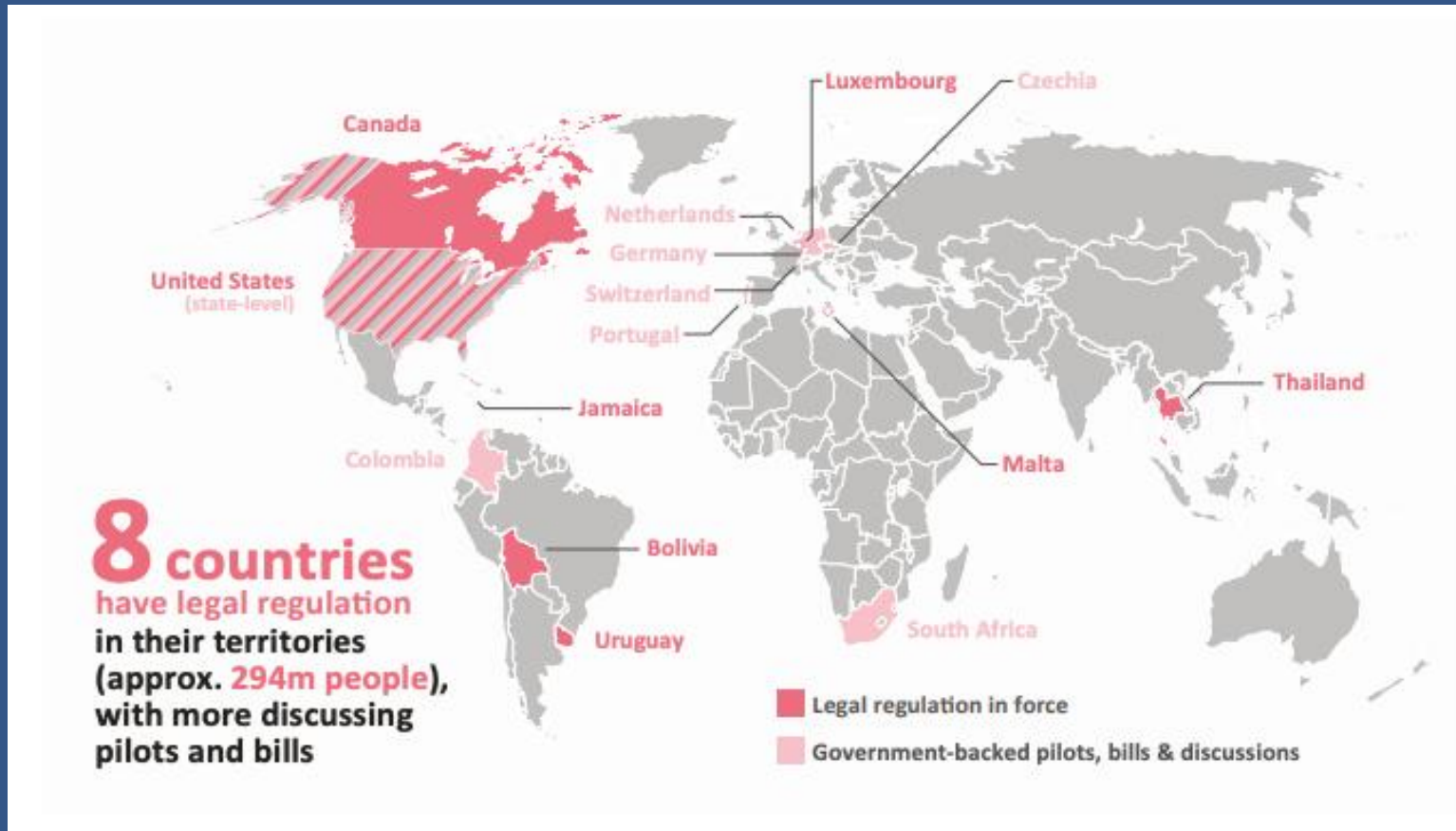
\$100 BILLION

**SPENT EVERY YEAR
ON THE WAR ON DRUGS**



Where are we now?

Increasing polarisation



- War on drugs vs reforms (decriminalisation, legal regulation)

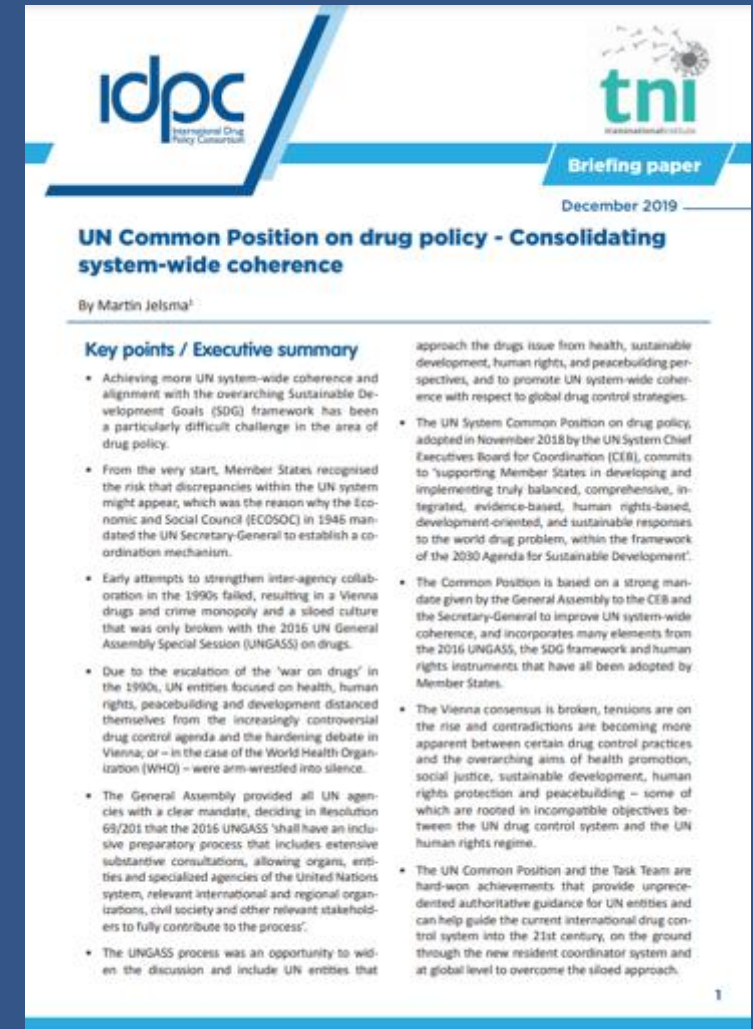
Increasing recognition at the UN that the current approach is not working

- **1998:** 'A drug-free world, we can do it!'
- **2016:** 1st time pillars on human rights, health & development added to a high-level political document on drugs
- **2024:** 62 countries call for a review of the UN drug control system



Increasing involvement of the UN human rights system shifts the discourse

- 2016 UNGASS on drugs: catalyst moment for UN system coherence, momentum has grown ever since
- 2018 UN System Common Position on drugs
- 2023 3rd Human Rights Council Resolution passes on drug policy
- Increasing guidance & recommendations from UN human rights system -> General Comment from UN CESCR
- But... Resistance from Vienna-based drug control bodies





“The ‘war on drugs’ may be understood to a significant extent as a war on people. Its impact has been greatest on those who live in poverty, and it frequently overlaps with discrimination directed at marginalised groups, minorities and Indigenous Peoples”

+20 UN human rights expert on World Drug Day 2023

Global support for Ending Criminal Sanctions for Personal Possession / Use DECRIMINALISATION



UN support for decriminalisation

- UN System Common Positions
 - on drugs (2018)
 - on drugs (2004)



UN Chief Executives Board (CEB) made up of 31 UN entities support the UN Common Position on drugs

Reasons to be hopeful...

2020: CANNABIS ‘RE-SCHEDULED’

- WHO ECDD performed “critical review”
- Recommended to take cannabis out of Schedule IV (1961)
- CND voted in favour (just!)
- Acknowledges “medical value” of cannabis
- (More than 500 million people now live in places that have / or are planning legally regulated markets)



Progress on harm reduction

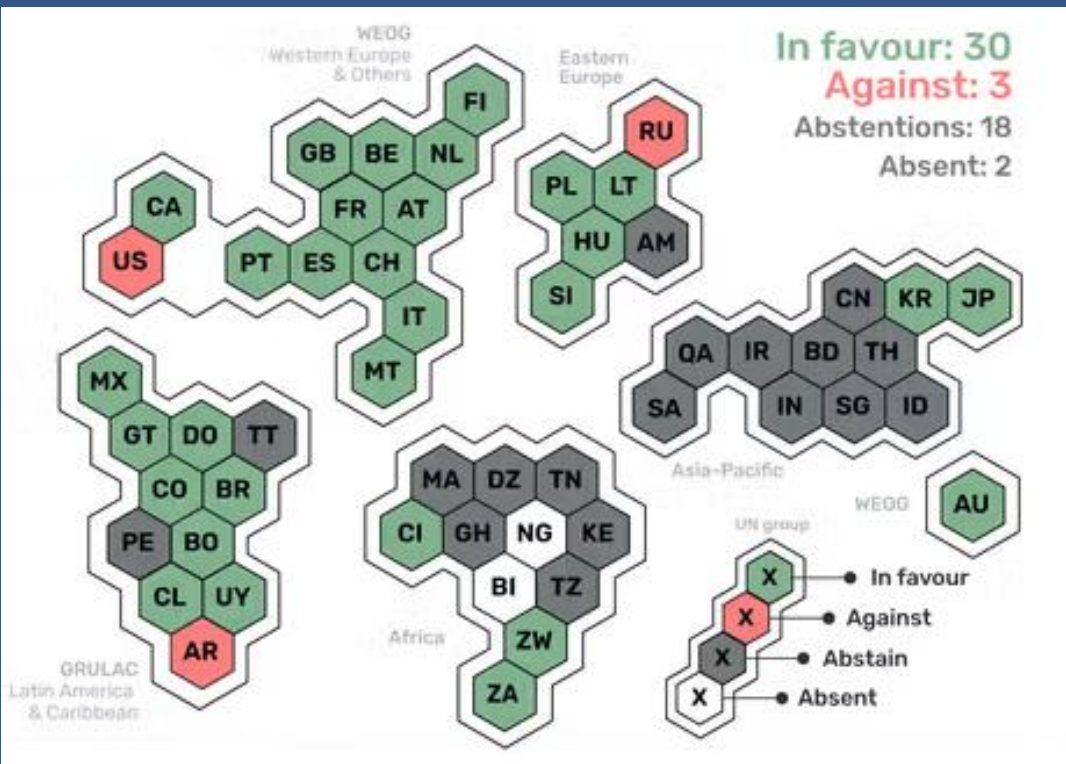
2024: CND ADOPTS 'HARM REDUCTION'

- US resolution on opioid overdose crisis
- Russia called for a vote and lost (38 v 2)
- 108 countries support harm reduction in national policy
- 93 countries have needle and syringe programmes
- 94 countries have opioid agonist therapy
- 18 countries have drug consumption rooms
- Yet still widely opposed, and drastically underfunded



Challenges to the UN regime

2025: NEW 'INDEPENDENT PANEL OF EXPERTS' CREATED



- Political shifts in USA impact the CND
- Resolution tabled by Colombia proposes an independent review of the “drug control machinery”
- Adopted with support across regions, including traditionally conservative countries
- Only USA, Russia and Argentina oppose

Challenges to the UN regime

2026: COCA LEAF

- Prohibition termed “a historical wrong” in conflict with Indigenous rights
- Review by WHO, with decision / vote at CND
- Role of Ireland - remove objection & EU position



2026/27: PANEL REVIEW & RECOMMENDATIONS

- Final report due March 2027
- Opportunity to properly review and critique a broken system
- In context of wider UN reviews and reforms too – UN80

Human rights...

- So much progress in past decade – HRC & General Assembly
- Indigenous rights is the next frontier for this fight
- But UN human rights regime is in crisis – Ukraine & Gaza
- New resolution at HRC to strengthen OHCHR mandate



Future is unwritten

- IDPC will continue to strive for social justice & human rights
- We will continue to challenge punitive & repressive drug policies that have failed
- Deep political uncertainty... But nothing is inevitable
- Believe in the power of movements to ignite change

