

LSRMUN2018



# The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

**Committee:** The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

**Topic A:** Analyzing the consequences of the legalization of cannabis for recreational use

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## I. Committee Background

The purpose of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) is to battle the use of illicit drugs and international crime. It was founded in 1997 through a merger between the United Nations Drug Control Programme and the Centre for International Crime Prevention. Currently, its headquarters are located in Vienna, Austria. The UNODC is currently working on educating individuals about the dangers of drug abuse and strengthening the fight against illicit drug and human trafficking. In 2015, the UNODC created the Global Act, which prevents and addresses trafficking of persons and the smuggling of migrants (GLO.ACT). This initiative is being co-funded by the European Union, which has so far donated 11 million euros (GLO. ACT, 2018). One of the most important achievements the UNODC has accomplished is the successful implementation of the Narcotics Reduction Unitized Programme (NOROUZ) in Iran. The program's main objective was to work with the government of the country in order to minimize the impact of drug use and its trafficking, in addition to the creation of educational groups and rehabilitation facilities (About, UNODC, 2018).

## II. Topic information

### A) History of Topic

Cannabis, which is also referred to as marijuana, is a narcotic “derived from the dried flowering tops, leaves, stems, and seeds of the Cannabis sativa (hemp)

plant” (Davis, Medical News Today, 2017). It is largely recognized as a banned substance in countries around the world. Recreational cannabis refers to cannabis that consumers can use freely with some variables imposed by the country or state which allows it. The consumer may also grow it themselves. This, however, includes limitations that vary per state/country. On December 10th, 2013, Uruguay became the first country to fully legalize marijuana (Crossan, PRI, 2013). It is becoming a popular trend among states and countries to legalize recreational marijuana. Some view this positively due to firm feedback from states or nations which have already legalized recreational cannabis. However, some are more concerned about the possible or already existing unfavourable outcomes of such actions (Chilkoti, *The New York Times*, 2017).

If cannabis were to be legalized in countries around the world it could save governments up to 8.7 billion United States (US) dollars per year (World Drug Report, UNODC, 2011). Moreover, recreational use minimizes the profitability of the drug for criminals and in turn decreases the violence and crime involved in the drug trade. In addition, it would increase safety for consumers of recreational cannabis, as they are not required to buy marijuana which could include toxic ingredients that could lead to severe illnesses or even death. However, legalizing cannabis could also result in severe consequences. A joint study by Harvard Medical School and Northwestern University’s Feinberg School of Medicine discovered that significant abnormalities showed up in 18 to 25 year olds’ brains who smoke recreational marijuana (Hoder, *Time*, 2014). Furthermore, the use of recreational marijuana alters the body’s function. It also damages the brain, liver and lungs. In relation, it increases the chances of breast, esophagus, liver and throat cancer. Regarding pregnancy, it may lead to miscarriage, preterm birth and stillbirth (WebMD, 2018).

Since 2013, the black market for cannabis has decreased around 30% (Carless, PRI, 2014). Globally, decisions to legalize this drug have been based on long held

beliefs about it. Many still believe that this drug can be harmful to young children if they are exposed to it; even though there has not been any cases where children or adults have died from using it (Rodriguez, *Forbes*, 2017). For many countries, legalizing cannabis would reduce active gangs selling the product and empower the legal cannabis industry (Glum, *Newsweek*, 2017). Currently, there have been conflicts about international laws related to cannabis. There are countries that totally accept cannabis and, therefore, citizens can grow it in their backyards, however, there is others that have harsh punishments that often involve long jail sentences or monetary fines. Over decades, international laws have failed to coexist between countries when it comes to cannabis and this has caused friction between differing points of view (Hamilton, *Vice News*, 2016).

A contradicting factor in the legalization of cannabis is the destruction of agricultural jobs. Canopy farmers (farming conducted in large rainforests) are losing investment and profit due to companies that produce marijuana taking over the industry. However, the economy related to cannabis has increased. Some international legal cannabis companies benefiting from legalization worldwide are Canopy Growth Corp, Pivot Pharmaceuticals, Lexaria, Vitality, Kush and General Cannabis Corp. These companies are earning millions of dollars after making recreational cannabis legal. The taxes from cannabis purchases have raised by billions of dollars and it is predicted to rise even more because of the increase in legalization all over the globe. By 2020, it is predicted to rise to over 20 billion US dollars (Burns, *The Daily Telescope*, 2017).

## **B) Current Issues**

**Saudi Arabia:** Cannabis is prohibited in Saudi Arabia and its possession most of the time leads to harsh punishments. The use or sale of the drug can result in long prison sentences or even death for Saudi citizens. Foreigners caught using cannabis can be deported back to their home nation. The possession, sale and cultivation of cannabis

for medical purposes is also not allowed. The Saudi Arabian government strongly believes recreational cannabis only brings negative consequences to its users. These include criminal and anti-social behaviour. Much of the cannabis found in Saudi Arabia is illegally imported from Pakistan and India (Gulf Business, 2017).

**Colombia:** In this nation, the possession of recreational cannabis is legal. The recreational use of the drug was legalized in 2012 after much government debate. However, the public consumption or sale of marijuana remains illegal. Users who wish to consume it must do so privately. Selling the drug for recreational use is not permitted. Furthermore, individuals are able to possess a maximum of 20 marijuana plants and 20 grams of marijuana for their own use. Colombia's view on the possession of cannabis for personal use is very open and flexible. The support for the rapid growth of the use of recreational cannabis is widespread (Casey, *The New York Times*, 2017).

**El Salvador:** This country is one of the world's most conservative nations when it comes to the use and sale of drugs in Latin America. Currently, El Salvador fully prohibits the use, consumption and sale of marijuana both for recreational and medicinal purposes. If found growing marijuana at home, individuals can face up to two decades in prison and receive large monetary fines. Over the past decade, hundreds of people have protested for the decriminalization of the consumption and cultivation of cannabis. However, only 8% of Salvadorans support the decriminalization of the drug (Woody, Business Insider, 2017). The country is a member nation of the 1998 United Nations Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, which supports the government in its mission to prevent the sale and consumption of drugs such as cannabis (UNTC, 2018).

**United Kingdom:** Currently, in the United Kingdom (UK) anyone who is found in possession of cannabis can be sentenced up to 5 years in prison. In addition, the production of or dealing of cannabis can result in 14 years of prison alongside a fine.

The reason that the UK has not approved this drug is the consideration of recent studies stating that, “cannabis is a harmful drug that may destabilize and harm the human body” (Metro, 2017). Even though cannabis is illegal, some citizens often use it for symptom relief or for medicinal purposes. Moreover, the government has approved of several medications that include cannabis in order to treat illnesses. One example is Sativex, which helps ease muscle pain for people suffering of Multiple Sclerosis. However, due to the UK’s strict drug laws, the medicine is highly controlled, difficult to obtain and very expensive (Thompson, *The Independent*, 2017).

**Romania:** This nation is very strict when it comes to laws involving cannabis. Still, it permits cannabis derivatives for medicinal use. This means that companies can only utilize derivatives of cannabis in medicines. For instance, only some chemically reduced parts of this plant are accepted, not the whole plant itself. Thus far, Romania has not legalized marijuana for recreational purposes (Gates, Huffington Post, 2013). If found in possession of the drug, those convicted can face jail time and significant fines. The cultivation and sale of cannabis is also not permitted. Several groups of Romanians are trying to persuade the government to enact legislation in order to decriminalize the possession of marijuana. One such group is the Cannabis Club Romania (Cannabis.info, 2017).

### **C) UN Action**

On June 5th, 2017, the United Nations Secretariat, alongside the World Health Organization (WHO), called for all drugs to be decriminalized. This, of course, includes recreational cannabis. The UN believes this would help focus more on prevention methods, education and healthcare. When Portugal decriminalized all drugs back in 2001, Antonio Gutierrez, the current UN Secretary-General, was the country’s prime minister. It is important to note that this change saw the nation’s drug death rate drop to one of the lowest in Europe. As Gutierrez did in Portugal, he is attempting to

approach drug users, including cannabis consumers, as addicts rather than criminals. The UN thoroughly believes that shifting from criminalizing drug users to a “prevention and treatment” method would be much more effective. This new approach is an extreme shift in policy for the organization, which the year before had supported a strong criminal approach to narcotics (Worley, *The Independent*, 2017).

### **III. Conclusion**

The acceptance of the recreational use of cannabis varies around the world. Some countries have chosen to legalize it, while others have chosen not to for various reasons such as academic research and public opinion. Benefits of legalizing recreational cannabis include a decrease in crime, new sources of economic development and less dangers related to using the drug. However, countries that have not legalized it refer to scientific studies, which demonstrate the drug’s long term damage to the human brain and central nervous system. The UN has recently called for the legalization of cannabis as it believes that it could bring many benefits to governments and the drug’s users. The UNODC must come together to make a decision on the consequences of the drug and the impact its legalization has on nations around the world.

### **IV. Essential Questions**

1. What is cannabis? How does it affect the human body?
2. Does your country support the legalization of cannabis for recreational use? Why is this?
3. Which are your nation’s current laws regarding the use of cannabis?

4. What has the UN done to address this issue?
5. Which have been the positive outcomes of legalizing the recreational use of cannabis? Which have been the negative outcomes?
6. How has the legalization of cannabis impacted the agricultural sector?
7. Why are some countries opposed to legalizing the recreational use of cannabis?
8. What are the medical benefits of cannabis? Why have some nations chosen to permit cannabis for medical purposes and not for recreational use?

## V. Resources

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