

## Press release

**Under embargo until: 00:01hrs Wednesday 5 March 2008**

### **DrugScope: UN drug experts must condemn human rights abuses**

DrugScope, the UK's leading drug information charity, has responded today to the launch of the latest annual report by the UN's International Narcotics Control Board (INCB). DrugScope welcomes the INCB's call for proportionality in the enforcement of drug laws around the world, but considers that the INCB must do much more to condemn the many human rights abuses perpetuated in the so-called 'war against drugs'.

In its latest report, the INCB has highlighted the need for all countries to balance their obligations under the international drug treaties with those of UN human rights legislation. It describes a principle of 'proportionality' that should be applied to all national drug law enforcement (1). The principle states that member countries must ensure that drug law enforcement is proportionate and in full compliance with the rule of law, including international agreements on human rights.

In its consideration of the proportionality principle, however, the INCB makes no specific reference to specific countries where infringements or limitations of human rights are currently taking place. DrugScope and the IDPC are disappointed by these key omissions from the INCB's discussion of proportionality, examples of which include:

- failure to discuss plans announced by Chinese officials to place a million drug users in compulsory detoxification prior to the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing.
- despite a recent visit to Brazil, the INCB report does not mention the 449 people who were shot and killed in the first half of 2007 in drug enforcement operations by police. Brazilian children, recruited into drug gangs, are considered legitimate targets by police and are shot at frequently in incursions into Rio's favelas.
- the INCB has remained silent on the many human rights abuses and deaths in Thailand during Thaksin Shinawatra's 'war on drugs' in 2003/04; lack of such condemnation from the UN may be contributing to Thailand's current willingness to consider another wave of such extreme enforcement tactics.
- 64 countries retain the death penalty and of those, half apply the death penalty to drug-related offences. This is in violation of international human rights law (1).
- each year, China uses the UN's International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Drug Trafficking (26 June) as a day to carry out mass, public executions of drug offenders. In 2002, the day was marked by 64 public executions across the country (2).

DrugScope is a founding member of the International Drug Policy Consortium (IDPC), a coalition that aims to promote objective and open debate about national and international drug policy. In that capacity, DrugScope's Director of Communications and Information, Harry Shapiro said:

"Drug users are vilified and marginalised worldwide. Some nations feel that any action against them is justified, including murder. We are encouraged that the INCB recognises this is unacceptable and that a balance must be struck between the enforcement of drug laws and the human rights and civil liberties of those with serious problems.

“But DrugScope and the International Drug Policy Consortium feel that the INCB, from their position of international authority, must follow their condemnation of human rights abuses through to its logical conclusion. The INCB must offer public criticism of particular countries with the worst human rights record in this area.”