

Rt Hon David Cameron MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
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02 June 2011

Dear Prime Minister

We, the signatories of this letter, call on the Coalition Government to undertake a swift and transparent review of the effectiveness of current drug policies. Should such a review of the evidence demonstrate the failure of the current position we would call for the immediate de-criminalising of drug possession.

This week marks the 40th anniversary of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. In the past forty years use of illicit drugs in the UK has grown rapidly. It is clear that the present system of applying the criminal law to the personal use and possession of drugs has failed in its aim. Conversely, the harms caused by pursuing this approach to drug use have been significant.

In the last year alone nearly 81,000 people in the UK were found guilty or cautioned for possession of an illegal drug - most were young, black or poor. This policy is costly for taxpayers and damaging for communities. Criminalising people who use drugs leads to greater social exclusion and stigmatisation making it much more difficult for them to gain employment and to play a productive role in society. It creates a society full of wasted resources.

In 2010 the Vienna Declaration was launched at the International AIDS conference, the declaration called for a more evidence based health focused approach to drug policy and for the decriminalisation of drug possession. To date the Declaration has been signed by over 20,000 people worldwide including former presidents of several South American countries, Nobel Prize winners in the fields of science and literature, members of the judiciary and senior law enforcement officials. In the UK there have been repeated calls for a review of the current system from members of the Bar Council, the medical profession and members of the House of Commons, notably the former Minister responsible for drugs.

In 2001 Portugal decriminalised the possession of all drugs. Portugal's system has been academically reviewed and many positive outcomes have been identified including an

increase in people accessing treatment voluntarily, a reduction in the number of people who use drugs problematically and fewer drug related deaths. Even the number of young people using illicit drugs at all has decreased over the past decade. Whilst other factors such as increased investment in the treatment programme may be relevant to these outcomes, it is clear from the Portuguese system and other jurisdictions that there is no consistent link between decriminalisation and increases in drug use or related harms.

The failure of the current UK system of criminalisation is clear. It is time for the UK to review its policy and adopt a health focused, evidence based approach to drug use.

Yours sincerely

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Sting (Musician & Actor)

Dame Judi Dench (Actor)

Kathy Burke (Actor & Comedian)

Julie Christie (Actor)

Mike Leigh (Film Director)

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