

Alternatives To Drug Prohibition

Social Responsibility Resolution

To be proposed at the CUC AGM, Winnipeg, 2003.

WHEREAS Canadian Unitarians are committed to the inherent worth and dignity of every person, and to justice, equity and compassion in human relations, we do not support current drug policies that have a disproportionate effect on less advantaged individuals and communities;

WHEREAS Canadian Unitarians are committed to a free and responsible search for truth, we therefore support the development of new drug policies based on evidence-based research about drug use, addictions and the harm caused by current drug policies;

WHEREAS Canadian Unitarians are committed to maintaining the interdependent web of existence of which we are a part, we do not support the international war on drugs that has resulted in the poisoning of soil and ground water, and the destruction of lands of indigenous peoples, forcing them off their lands;

WHEREAS for decades Canadian Government public policy has attempted to enforce prohibition of many drugs, it is increasingly clear that this policy has failed to alleviate the consumption of illicit drugs and that the devastating effect of drug addiction on individual lives, families and neighbourhoods is increasing;

WHEREAS drug policies that reinforce criminal sanctions and negate the health impacts of addictions on society themselves cause harm to users and the broader community;

WHEREAS the consequence of enforced prohibition of drugs is that drug users and addicts are dealt with by the criminal justice system often resulting in counter productive incarceration and difficulties in accessing appropriate health and treatment services;

WHEREAS Canadian drug policies reinforce negative stereotypes of drug users as abusers, as being harmful to others and as threatening to society as a whole;

WHEREAS the laws that define some drugs as illegal have directly led to a violent, exploitative and highly profitable global market for an unregulated, unsafe product.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Canadian Unitarian Council:

1. Propose that drug addiction be regarded as a health issue rather than a criminal one. Drug users would be provided with access to health and treatment services rather than be processed through the criminal justice system. It is recognized that a significant percentage of drug users have a mental health diagnosis. Treating them as criminals rather than as people with health problems is inappropriate.
2. Propose that the concept of harm reduction be incorporated into current drug policy. We suggest that "harm reduction" approaches are those which: a) Help drug users minimize potential harms associated with drug use to both themselves and community members from health risks such as HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis through such measures as needle exchanges, heroin maintenance programs and safe consumption sites and, b) Provide opportunities for users to reduce or eliminate their drug use through ensuring access to safe shelter, health services,

- housing and employment training programs.
3. Urge that a range of appropriate, accessible and affordable treatment choices be made available, as needed, for people dealing with addictions.
 4. Urge that appropriate drug education materials be developed and integrated into school curricula, using evidence-based research and facts, and which promote dialogue without fear of censure or reprisal.
 5. Urge that the emphasis shift from enforcement (now 95% of resources) to prevention, treatment and harm reduction.
 6. Support the depenalization of drug possession for personal use.
 7. Support the establishment of appropriately restrictive regulations with respect to the distribution, quality control and taxation of drugs, considering such factors as age, medical diagnosis, and potential for abuse or harm.
 8. Urge that enforcement be more appropriately focused on addressing the sale and distribution/ importation/ exportation of drugs in order to reduce violent and predatory drug-related crime.
 9. Urge that the Canadian Government consider the findings of the LeDain Royal Commission, the report "Cannabis: Our Position for a Canadian Public Policy" by the Special Senate Committee on Illegal Drugs, the conclusions of the Canadian House of Commons Report "Policy for the New Millennium: Working Together to Redefine Canada's Drug Policy", and the findings of other Canadian studies including "Injection Drug Use and HIV/AIDS: Legal and Ethical Issues" (The Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, 1999), all of which support significant changes in drug laws and policy.
 10. Urge learning from experiences gained from prohibition/control on alcohol, and incorporate lessons learned with alcohol and nicotine distribution (e.g., prohibition of sale to children, controls, government stores, advertising control, and use prohibited in some settings).
 11. Establish the Alternatives to Drug Prohibition Monitoring Group, charged with keeping abreast of current developments in the area of drug policy and law reform, preparing statements for the media, and making representations to the Federal, Provincial and local governments and, where appropriate, to international bodies, emphasizing the need for amelioration of the harms caused by present public drug policies.

CONCLUSION

Our Unitarian history calls us to pursue a more just world. Our faith compels us to hold our leaders accountable to the ineffective and harmful effects of current policies. In calling for a radical change in Canadian drug policy we are mindful of its victims. Addiction is a disease (and a disability according to Canadian human rights law) and consumption of drugs should not be a crime. Our Unitarian values also call us to reflect upon the spiritual crisis faced by people with addictions. Dependence on or inappropriate use of legal or illegal drugs may point to unmet human needs or alienation from community life. Our values compel us to advocate for compassionate policies. We believe that Canadian society has the imagination and capability to better address the complex issues around the demand for drugs, both legal and illegal. We build on the social witness positions taken by the Canadian Unitarian Council in resolutions on drug policy that have been adopted from 1968 to the present. Let not fear or any other barrier prevent us from advocating a more just, compassionate world.