



# NEWS RELEASE

## **Beyond Criminalization: Healthier Ways to Control Drugs**

**For Immediate Release**

**April 30, 2006**

**VANCOUVER** - Recommendations for healthier ways to control the sale and use of currently illegal drugs, which will benefit drug users as well as the wider community, will be made this week as speakers from the International Harm Reduction Conference address Vancouver-area residents in a series of public dialogues.

The Vancouver community coalition, Keeping the Door Open: Dialogues on Drug Use, is hosting three free public dialogues with international, national and local experts to explain how regulating illegal drugs, in similar ways to how alcohol and tobacco are regulated, is a healthier approach than the existing prohibition model.

“Increasingly around the world, people are realizing that prohibition just doesn’t work – not for people dependent on drugs nor for the communities where they live,” said Gillian Maxwell, chair of Keeping the Door Open: Dialogues on Drug Use.

“What other public policy area receives increased budgets without showing positive results? Governments around the world spend billions of dollars fighting the illegal drug trade, but it has not diminished the trade at all. It is time to accept reality and adopt a new approach that treats addiction as a health and social issue that should never have been criminalized,” she added.

The three topics being addressed at the sessions at the Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue are: Drug Regulation: An Alternative to Prohibition (May 1); Drug Regulation: Impacts on Policing and Prisons (May 2); and Drug Regulation: A Saner Discussion about Crystal Meth (May 4).

Dr. Gustavo de Grieff, a former attorney general of Colombia involved in fighting some of the largest drug cartels in the world, knows intimately the power of the cartels and eventually came to believe the U.S.-backed War on Drugs is futile.

- MORE -

“The police arrested the drug traffickers, dismembered cartels, confiscated property, destroyed laboratories, intercepted drug shipments and, in spite of all that, nothing happened in the general panorama of the drug fight because it kept coming to the consumer markets, especially the most important one – the United States. The business is so profitable that if you disintegrate one cartel, other narco-traffickers take its place in the market,” said Dr. de Grief, the keynote speaker for Drug Regulation: An Alternative to Prohibition.

“What we need to do is legalize the production, commerce and trade of the drugs, and at the same time implement educational campaigns and treatment for addicts so that we will have real solutions for both parts of the drug problem,” he added.

Besides contributing to crime, public disorder and poor health for drug users, drug prohibition also contributes to more dangerous drugs constantly emerging, says Dr. Alex Wodak, Director, Drug and Alcohol Service, St. Vincent’s Hospital, Sydney, Australia, a founder of the International Harm Reduction Association, and keynote speaker for ‘A Saner Discussion About Crystal Meth’.

“One of the results of prohibition is that more dangerous drugs such as crystal meth replace less dangerous drugs. It is clear we cannot enforce our way out of this problem,” said Dr. Wodak. “That is what is tried around the world, at great financial and human cost, and we can see it doesn’t work. We need to change from a reliance on drug law enforcement to implementing sound public policy based on health and social measures.”

It is time to move the debate from why – to how – we should legally regulate the drug trade, says Danny Kushlick, director of the U.K.-based Transform Drug Policy Foundation.

“It is the responsibility of all of us to engage in an adult debate about the specific alternatives to global prohibition. Because of the taboo around drugs, this is not an issue that we can simply leave to policy makers. I believe ordinary citizens will do a better job in helping to design an effective, just and humane alternative to the current broken system,” he said.

Keeping the Door Open: Dialogues on Drug Use is a Vancouver coalition of individuals and organizations representing a diverse range of stakeholder groups, institutional and community-based service providers, health authorities, research centres, charitable foundations, public policy makers, drug consumers, consumer advocates, government and business officials.