The United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Drugs (UNGASS):

Why It Matters for Canada

Dan Werb, PhD
Nazlee Maghsoudi, MGA

St. Michael's Hospital, February 16th, 2016

INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR SCIENCE IN DRUG POLICY
WWW.ICSDP.ORG/PUBLICATIONS

OUTLINE

1. The ICSDP
2. Why is UNGASS important?
3. An Aside: Drug Policy 101
4. Canada: A Changed Landscape
   - Canada's Stance Under PM Harper
   - Since October 2015
5. Asks from Canadian Civil Society

The ICSDP

INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR SCIENCE IN DRUG POLICY

The ICSDP

SCIENTIFIC BOARD

A number of global leaders and experts sit on the Scientific Board. The Board helps to guide the scientific activities of the ICSDP and, along with relevant working groups and the Technical Advisors, ensures that all publications and knowledge translation activities contain accurate scientific information.

TECHNICAL ADVISORS

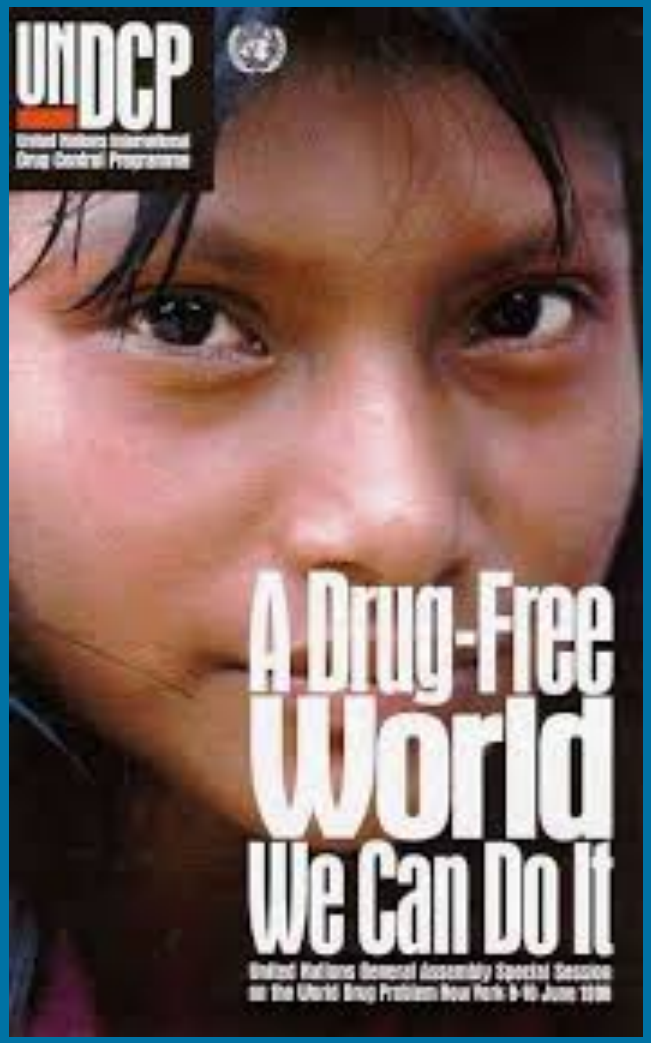
Technical Advisors are experts from a variety of disciplines relevant to illicit drug policy. These individuals help to ensure that all research produced by the ICSDP adheres to the highest scientific standards by providing peer review for publications.

Frederick Altice
Apinum Aramrattana
Judith Auerbach
Tasnim Azim
Aram Barra
Francisco Bastos
David Bewley-Taylor
Ricky Bluthenthal
Scott Burris
Patrizia Carrieri
Paul Dietze
Benedikt Fischer
Samuel Friedman
Sandro Galea
Holly Hagan
Robert Heimer
Margaret Hellard
Adeeba Kamarulzaman
Jan "Jano" Klimas
Alex Kral
Lisa Maher
Thomas Patterson
Tim Rhodes
Alison Ritter
Jeffrey Samet
Lisa Sánchez
Susan Sherman
Ambros Uchtenhagen
Alex Wodak

THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY SPECIAL SESSION ON THE WORLD DRUG PROBLEM

Why is UNGASS important?

- Largest international meeting on illicit drug policy since 1998 – “A Drug Free World: We Can Do It”



Why is UNGASS important?

- Originally scheduled for 2019, but Presidents of Mexico, Guatemala, and Colombia requested it be held earlier
- Scheduled for April 19-21 2016 at the UN HQ in NY

Why is UNGASS important?

"I urge Member States to use these opportunities to conduct a wide-ranging and open debate that considers all options."

UN Secretary General
Ban Ki-Moon
26th June 2013

Why is UNGASS important?

UNGASS outcome document has major implications for all kinds of UN activities

(HLM on HIV/SDGs/Agency approaches to drugs…the list goes on)

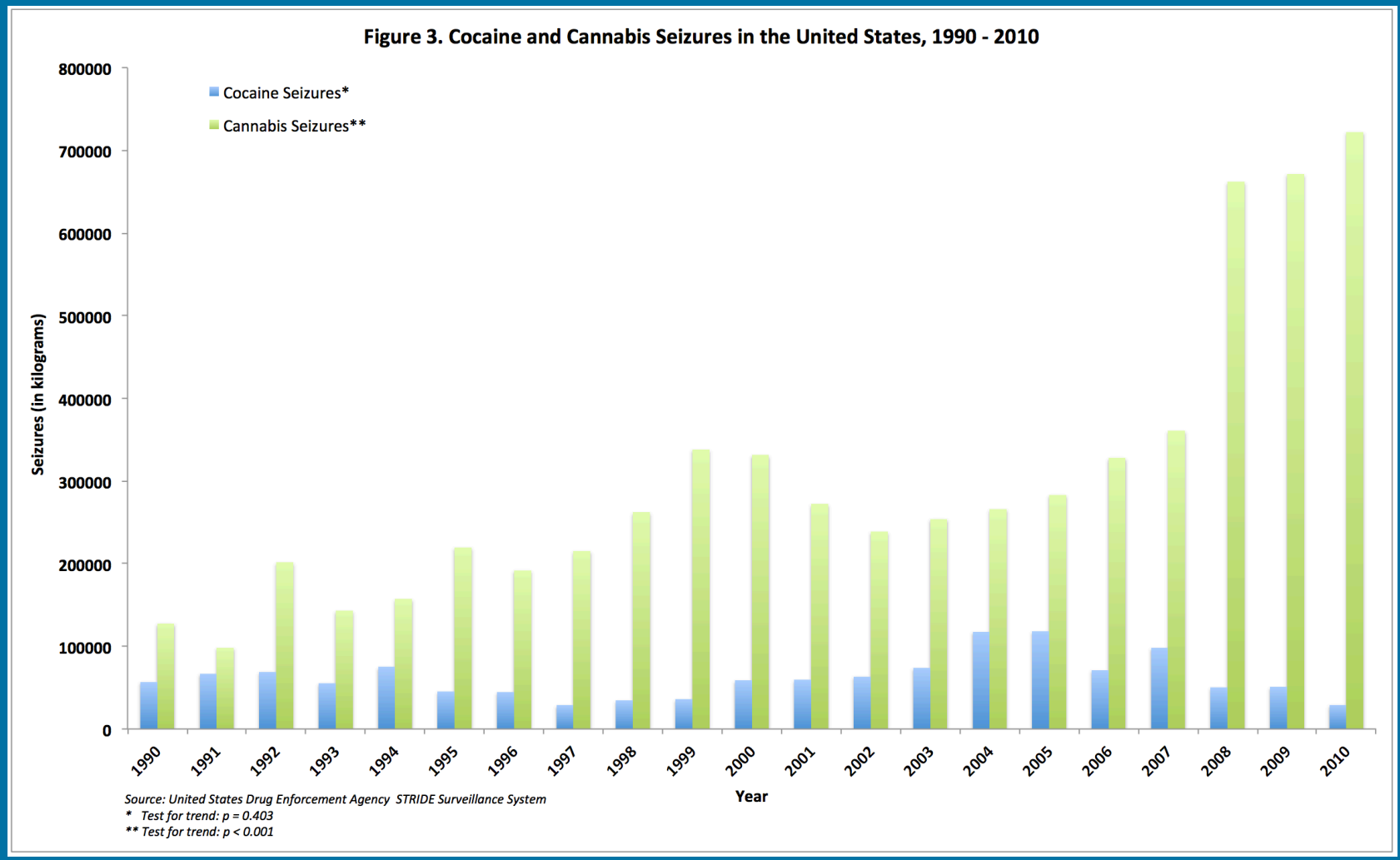
Why is UNGASS important?

- Taking place against a backdrop of increasing calls for global drug policy reform

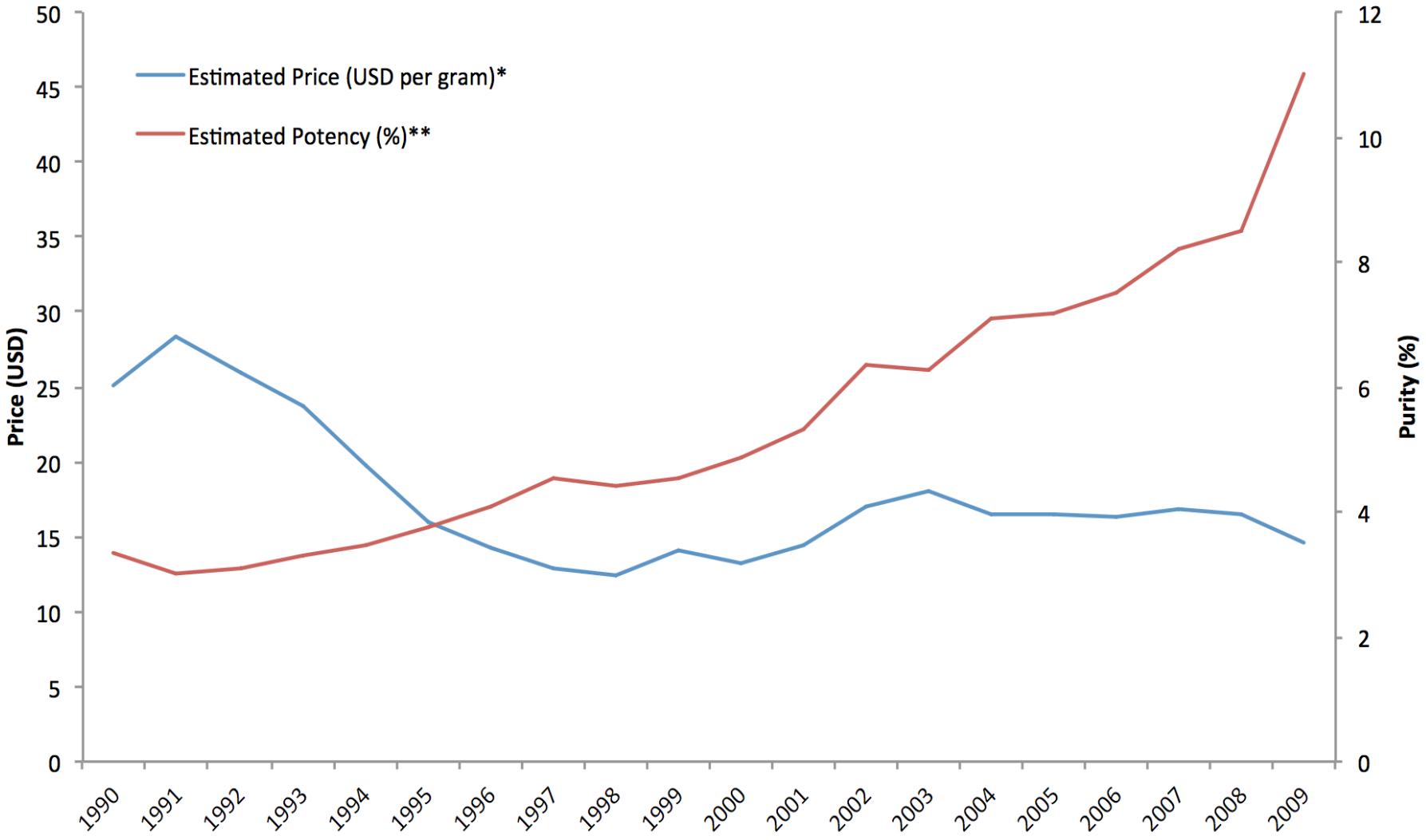
- Increasing number of countries seeking policy experimentation require guidance

- Better scientific understanding of drug vs. drug policy related harms

An Aside: Drug Policy 101
Impact of Drug Policy

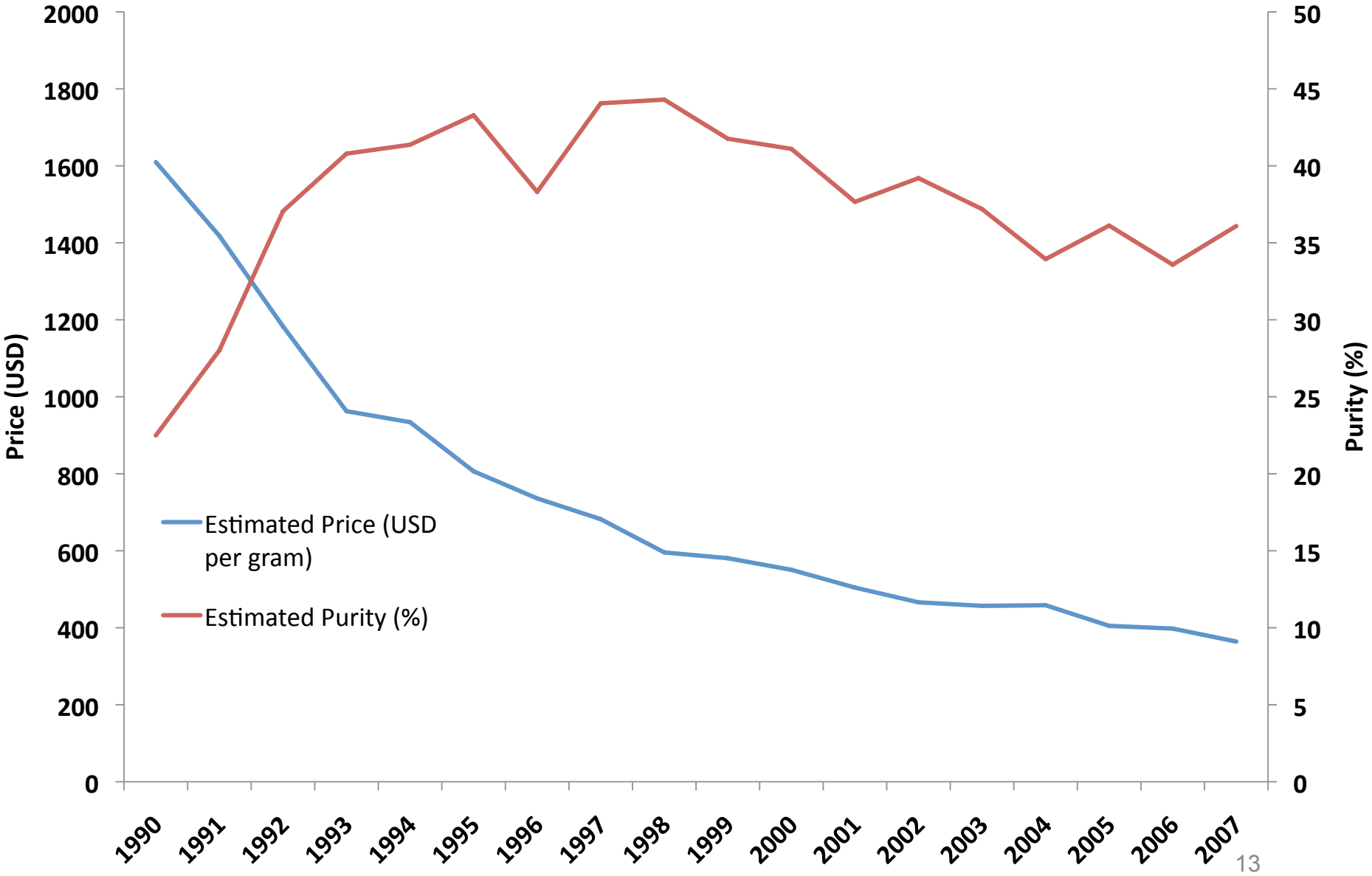


Estimated Price and Potency of Cannabis in the United States, 1990 - 2009



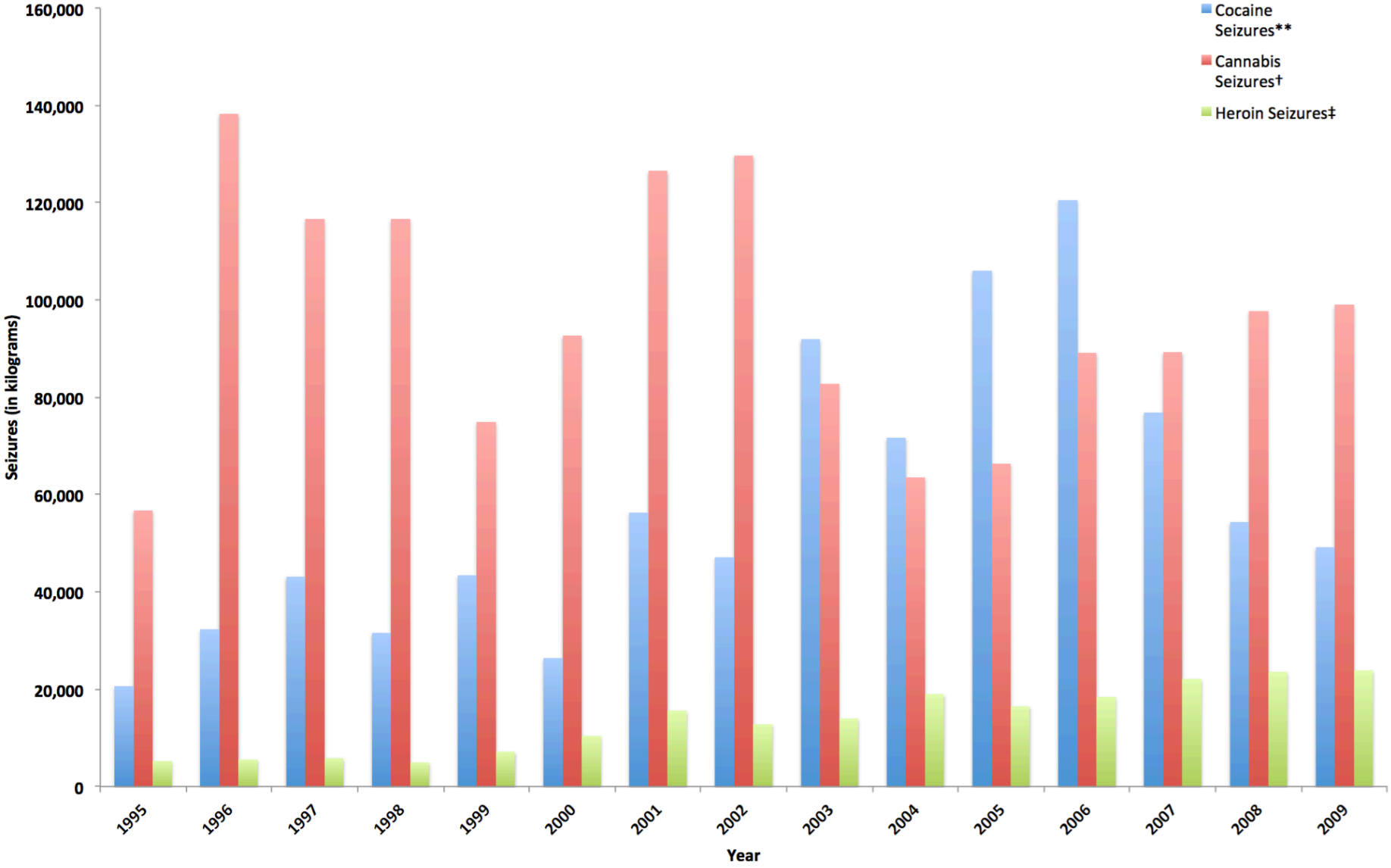
Source: Drug Enforcement Agency STRIDE Surveillance System
Note: Price adjusted for purity and inflation and expressed in 2011 USD
** Test for trend p = 0.010*
*** Test for trend p < 0.001*

Estimated Price and Purity of Heroin in the United States, 1990 - 2007 (Inflation Adjusted)



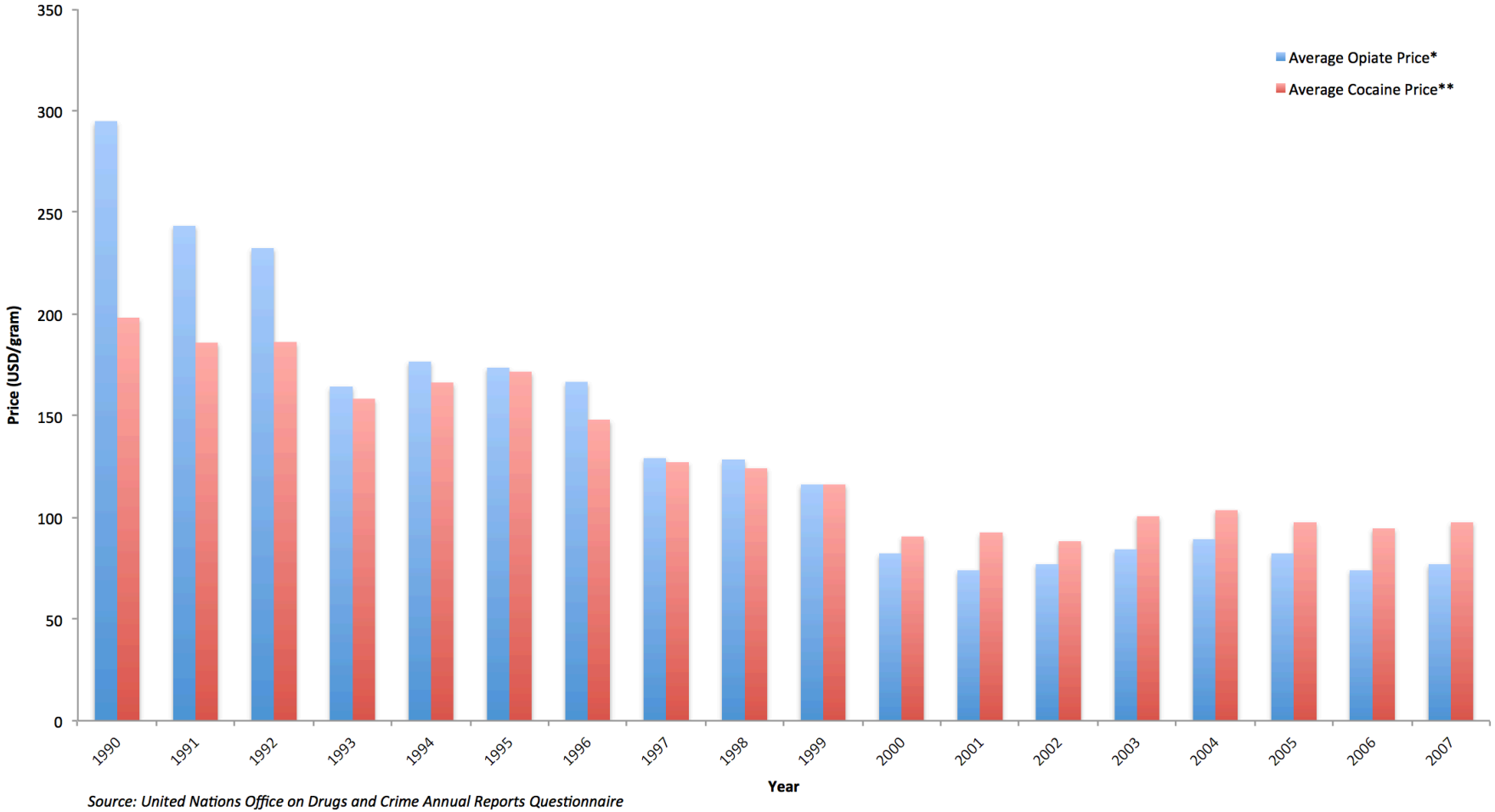
Source: Drug Enforcement Agency STRIDE Surveillance System

Figure 4. Cocaine, Cannabis and Heroin Seizures in Europe*, 1990 - 2010



Source: European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction REITOX Network
** Refers to European Union member countries, Croatia, Norway, and Turkey*
*** Test for trend: p = 0.018*
† Test for trend: p = 0.446
‡ Test for trend: p < 0.001

Figure 2. Average Inflation-Adjusted Price of Opiates and Cocaine in Europe, 1990 - 2007



Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Annual Reports Questionnaire
Note: Price adjusted for CPI inflation
** Test for trend: $p < 0.001$*
*** Test for trend: $p < 0.001$*

An Aside: Drug Policy 101
Impact of Drug Policy

OPEN ACCESS Freely available online PLOS MEDICINE

Toward a Global View of Alcohol, Tobacco, Cannabis, and Cocaine Use: Findings from the WHO World Mental Health Surveys

Louisa Degenhardt[1*], Wai-Tat Chiu[2], Nancy Sampson[2], Ronald C. Kessler[2], James C. Anthony[3], Matthias Angermeyer[4], Ronny Bruffaerts[5], Giovanni de Girolamo[6], Oye Gureje[7], Yueqin Huang[8], Aimee Karam[9], Stanislav Kostyuchenko[10], Jean Pierre Lepine[11], Maria Elena Medina Mora[12], Yehuda Neumark[13], J. Hans Ormel[14], Alejandra Pinto-Meza[15], José Posada-Villa[16], Dan J. Stein[17], Tadashi Takeshima[18], J. Elisabeth Wells[19]

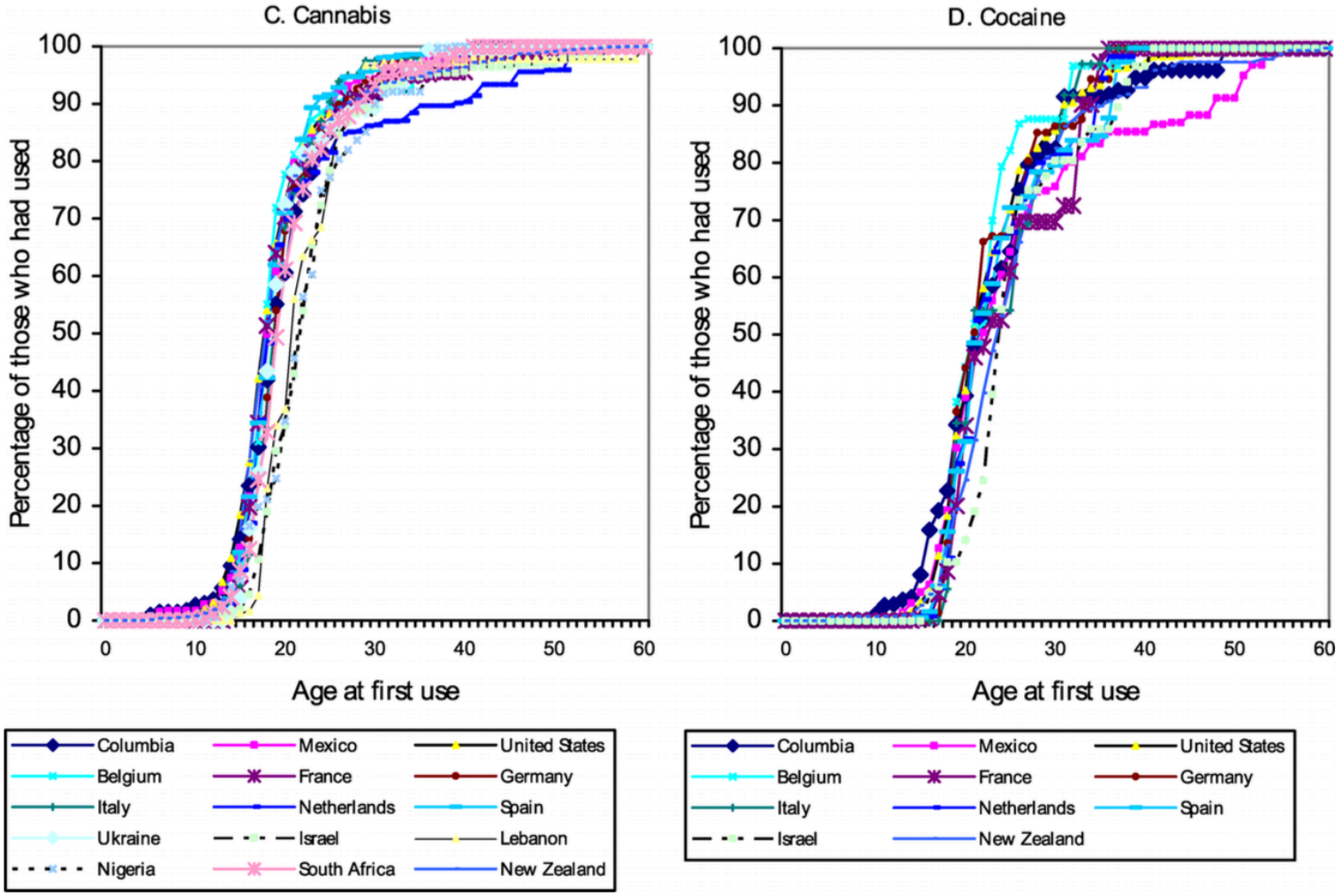


Figure 1. AOO of Drug Use among Those Reporting Any Use by Country

An Aside: Drug Policy 101
Impact of Drug Policy

OPEN ACCESS Freely available online PLOS MEDICINE

Toward a Global View of Alcohol, Tobacco, Cannabis, and Cocaine Use: Findings from the WHO World Mental Health Surveys

Louisa Degenhardt[1*], Wai-Tat Chiu[2], Nancy Sampson[2], Ronald C. Kessler[2], James C. Anthony[3], Matthias Angermeyer[4], Ronny Bruffaerts[5], Giovanni de Girolamo[6], Oye Gureje[7], Yueqin Huang[8], Aimee Karam[9], Stanislav Kostyuchenko[10], Jean Pierre Lepine[11], Maria Elena Medina Mora[12], Yehuda Neumark[13], J. Hans Ormel[14], Alejandra Pinto-Meza[15], José Posada-Villa[16], Dan J. Stein[17], Tadashi Takeshima[18], J. Elisabeth Wells[19]

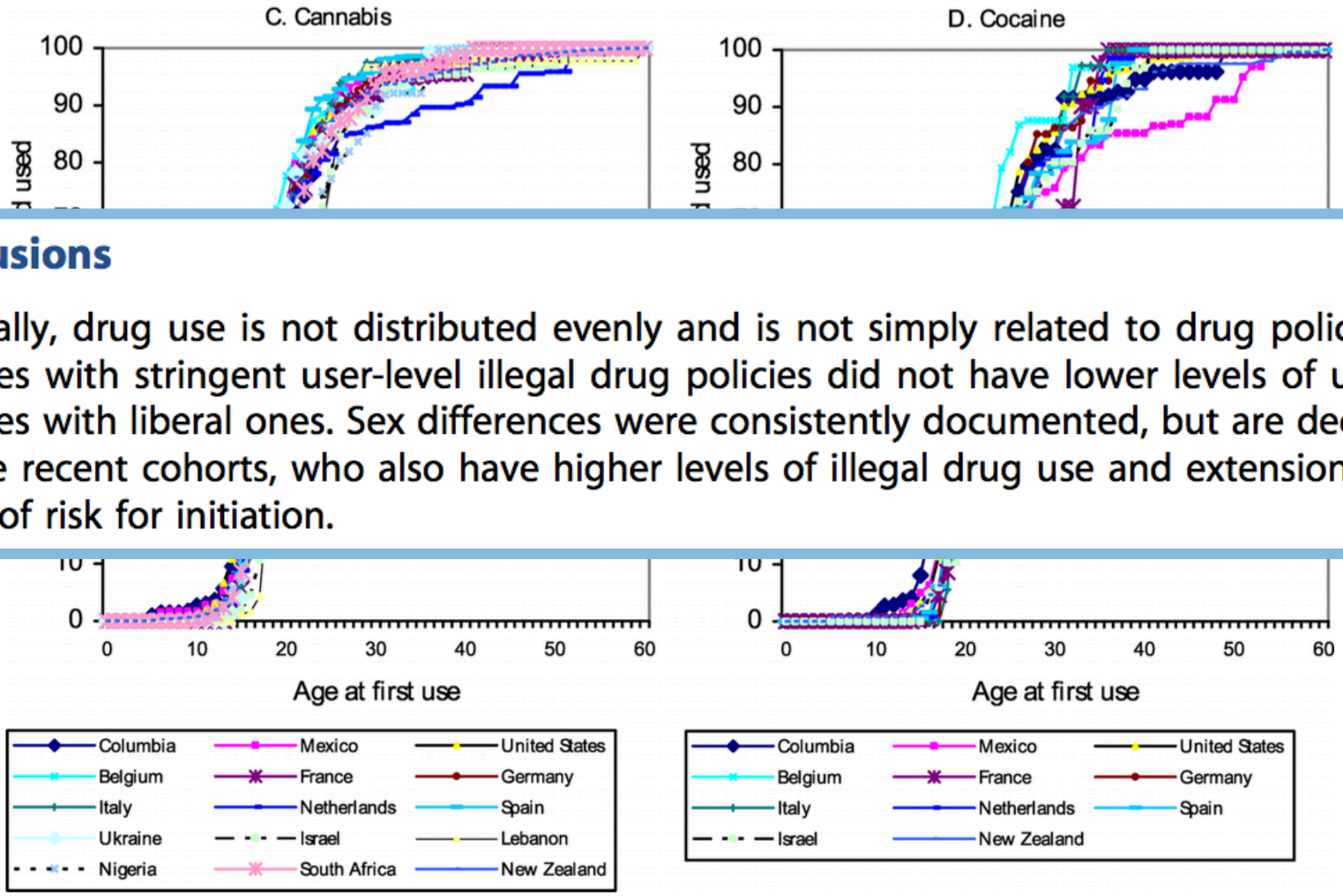


Figure 1. AOO of Drug Use among Those Reporting Any Use by Country

Conclusions

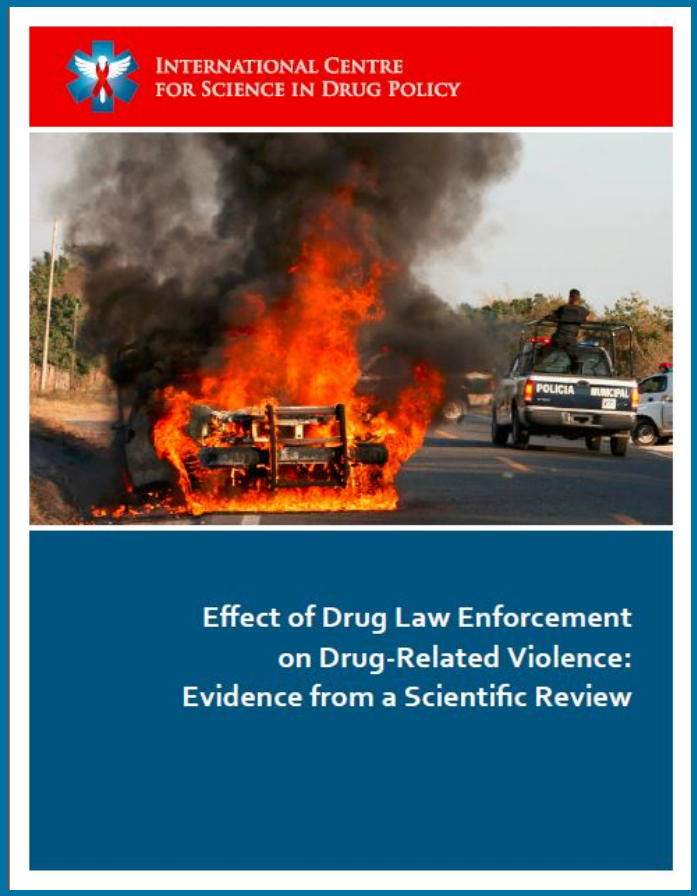
Globally, drug use is not distributed evenly and is not simply related to drug policy, since countries with stringent user-level illegal drug policies did not have lower levels of use than countries with liberal ones. Sex differences were consistently documented, but are decreasing in more recent cohorts, who also have higher levels of illegal drug use and extensions in the period of risk for initiation.

An Aside: Drug Policy 101
Impact of Drug Policy

"Drugs have harmed many people, but bad government policies have harmed many more"

Kofi Annan,
Former UN Secretary General

An Aside: Drug Policy 101
~~*Unintended*~~ *Consequences: Violence*



- Evidence suggests that drug law enforcement is likely to increase the levels of violence in illicit drug markets
- Alternative approaches may be more effective at ensuring community safety & security

An Aside: Drug Policy 101
~~*Unintended*~~ *Consequences: Development*

- Current drug policies, particularly supply reduction efforts, have exacerbated poverty and impeded development
- Alternative development efforts have been inadequate
- Access to legal markets needed

An Aside: Drug Policy 101
~~*Unintended*~~ *Consequences: Human Rights*

International Journal of Drug Policy 28 (2016) 1–9

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

International Journal of Drug Policy

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/drugpo

Editors' Choice

The effectiveness of compulsory drug treatment: A systematic review

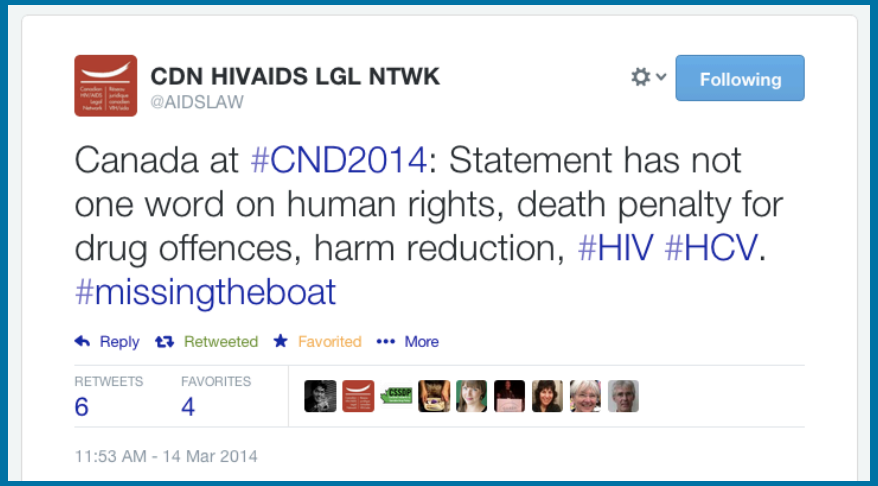
D. Werb [a,b,*], A. Kamarulzaman [c], M.C. Meacham [b], C. Rafful [b], B. Fischer [d], S.A. Strathdee [b], E. Wood [a,b,e]

[a] International Centre for Science in Drug Policy, Li Ka Shing Knowledge Institute of St. Michael's Hospital, 30 Bond Street, Toronto, ON, Canada M5B 1W8
[b] Division of Global Public Health, Department of Medicine, University of California, San Diego, 9500 Gilman Drive, La Jolla, CA 92093-0507, USA
[c] Faculty of Medicine, University of Malaya, 50603 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
[d] Social & Epidemiological Research Unit, Centre for Addiction & Mental Health (CAMH), 33 Russell Street, Toronto, ON, Canada M5S 3B1
[e] Urban Health Research Initiative, BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS, 608-1081 Burrard Street, Vancouver, BC, Canada V6Z 1Y6

- Right to Life
- Right to be Free from Torture
- Right to Health
  - Access to WHO list of essential medicines (*includes opioids + methadone)

Canada: A Changed Landscape
Canada's Stance Under PM Harper

- Opposition to harm reduction domestically and internationally
- Silence on human rights violations
  - Death penalty for drug offences
- Lack of civil society engagement
- Friends included Russia, China, etc.



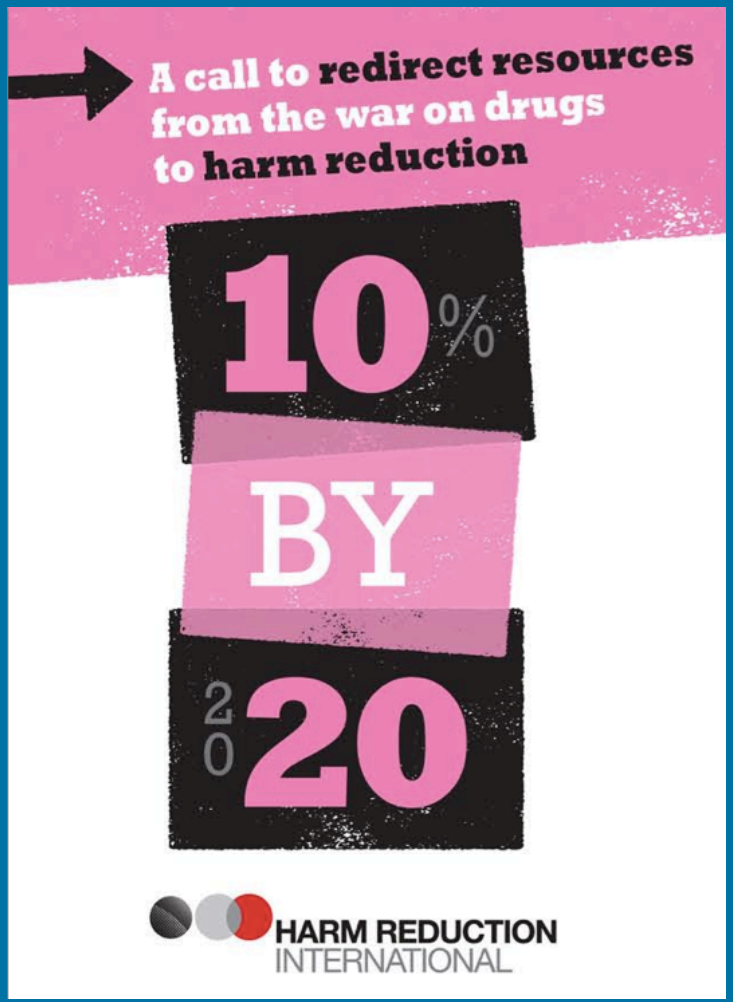
Canada: A Changed Landscape
Since October 2015

- Support for harm reduction domestically
- Commitment to regulate cannabis markets
- Civil society engagement
- **Big Question:** How will this translate internationally?

Asks from Canadian Civil Society: *Public Health Approach*

1. Harm reduction
2. Decriminalization
3. Regulation / Experimentation with alternative approaches

Public Health Approach: Harm Reduction



- Widely endorsed and proven vital to protect the health of this vulnerable group
  - Blood borne infections, including HIV and hepatitis C
  - Other drug-related harms, such as overdose
  - Improved health outcomes
- 91 countries include it in national policies but coverage (and funding) remains poor

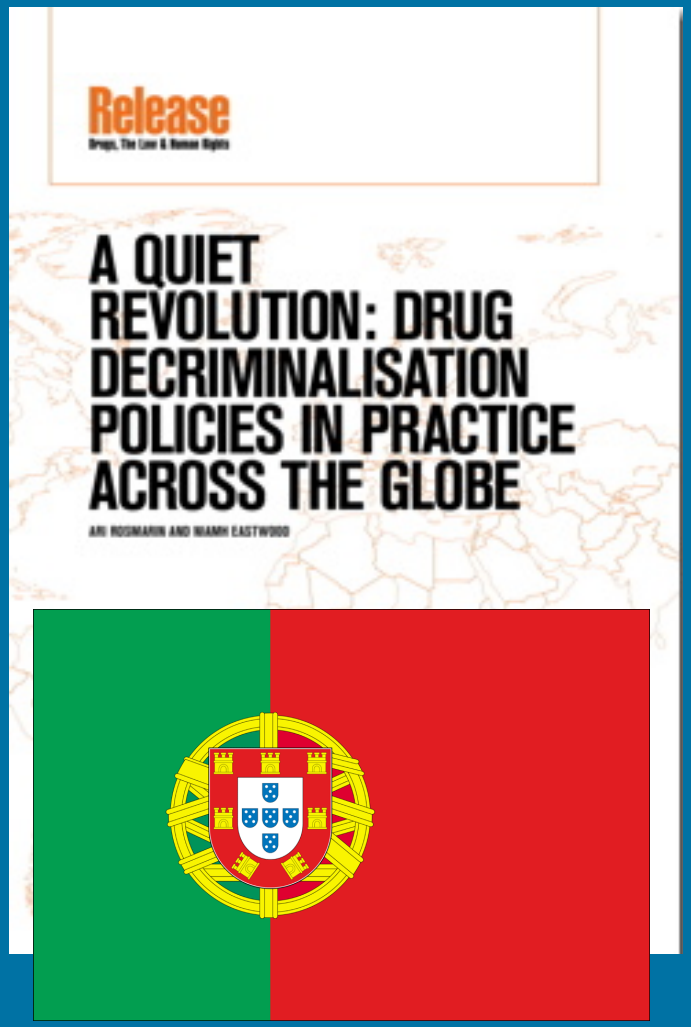
Public Health Approach: Decriminalization

- Decriminalization of drug use is permitted by the UN treaties and endorsed by WHO, UNAIDS, UNDP, UN Women, OHCHR…

PEOPLE WHO USE AND/OR INJECT DRUGS

- Countries should work toward developing policies and laws that decriminalize injection and other use of drugs and, thereby, reduce incarceration.
- Countries should work toward developing policies and laws that decriminalize the use of clean needles and syringes (and that permit NSPs) and that legalize OST for people who are opioid-dependent.
- Countries should ban compulsory treatment for people who use and/or inject drugs *(12, 13, 14)*.

Public Health Approach: Decriminalization



- Decriminalization is practiced in at least 21 countries around the world
- Portugal, since 2001:
  - HIV infections reduced
  - Overdoses reduced
  - Drug use did not increase

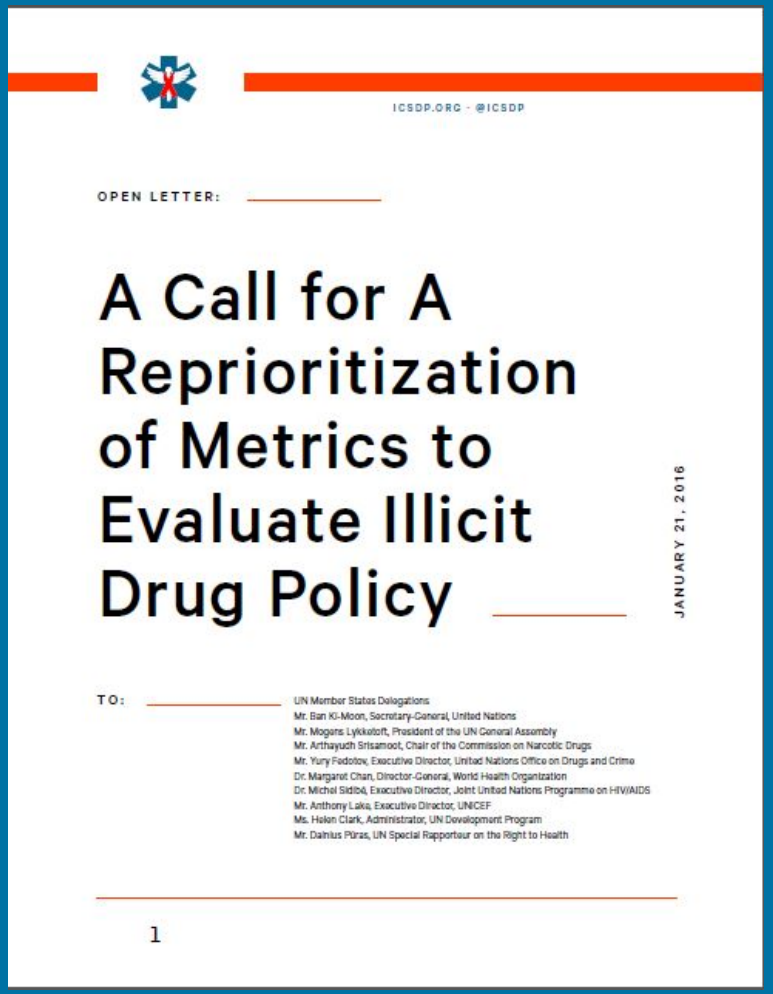
Public Health Approach: Regulation

- Regulation of psychotropic substances has a long history
- Few moves to regulation recently, with cannabis the notable exception
- Evidence strong for effectiveness of heroin prescription in reducing opioid-related harms

Asks from Canadian Civil Society

- Human Rights
  - Death penalty for drug offences
  - Torture and drug detention
- Access to Essential Medicines
- Diverse Representation at International Meetings
- “Drug-Free World” Language

Asks from Canadian Civil Society



ICSDP.ORG · @ICSDP

OPEN LETTER:

A Call for A Reprioritization of Metrics to Evaluate Illicit Drug Policy

JANUARY 21, 2016

TO: UN Member States Delegations
Mr. Ban Ki-Moon, Secretary-General, United Nations
Mr. Mogens Lykketoft, President of the UN General Assembly
Mr. Arthayudh Srisamoot, Chair of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs
Mr. Yury Fedotov, Executive Director, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
Dr. Margaret Chan, Director-General, World Health Organization
Dr. Michel Sidibé, Executive Director, Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
Mr. Anthony Lake, Executive Director, UNICEF
Ms. Helen Clark, Administrator, UN Development Program
Mr. Dainius Pūras, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health

1

- Optimizing drug policy metrics
- Post-UNGASS Mechanism

Key Scientific Contribution to UNGASS:

Thanks for listening!
Questions?

Dan – dwerb@ucsd.edu
Nazlee – nmaghsoudi@icsdp.org

INTERNATIONAL CENTRE
FOR SCIENCE IN DRUG POLICY
WWW.ICSDP.ORG/PUBLICATIONS