

# THE VIENNA DECLARATION fact sheet

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The Vienna Declaration calls for the incorporation of scientific evidence into illicit drug policies. Research shows that the criminalization of illicit drug users is fuelling the HIV epidemic and has resulted in overwhelmingly negative health and social consequences. A full policy reorientation is needed.

## Key facts that support the Vienna Declaration include:

### Global scale of drug use

- The largest numbers of injection drug users are in Russia, India and China, but injection drug use now occurs in over 148 countries worldwide, and continues to expand <sup>1,2</sup>
- Estimates suggest there are approximately 15.9 million people who inject drugs globally <sup>1</sup>

### Failure of the current “War On Drugs” approach

- Over the past several decades, international surveillance systems have shown that drug purity has generally increased while drug prices have decreased <sup>3</sup>
- There is no evidence that law enforcement reduces the prevalence of drug use <sup>4</sup>
- Studies show a direct link between drug law enforcement and various harms including increased HIV risk behaviour and drug-related violence <sup>5,6</sup>

### Costs of the current approach

- Approximately \$2.5 trillion (USD) has been spent on drug control efforts since the 1960's <sup>7</sup>
- The US spends approximately \$20 billion (USD) per year just on drug law enforcement <sup>8</sup>
- The international illegal drug market is worth an estimated \$320 billion (USD) per year; these profits are entirely outside of government control and fuel corruption and violence <sup>9</sup>

### Health impacts

- Outside of sub-Saharan Africa, 1 in 3 new HIV cases occur in intravenous drug users <sup>10,11</sup>
- In areas of Eastern Europe and Central Asia, HIV prevalence may be up to 70% among people who inject drugs <sup>1</sup>
- Hepatitis C prevalence among intravenous drug users is estimated to be as high as 90-95% in some Eurasian countries <sup>12</sup>
- Prohibitions on sterile needles and opioid substitution therapy results in avoidable HIV and HCV transmission <sup>2,13</sup>
- Methadone is an effective treatment for heroin use that is on the WHO's List of Essential Medicines, but is illegal in Russia where 1 in 100 adults are already infected – largely because of heroin use

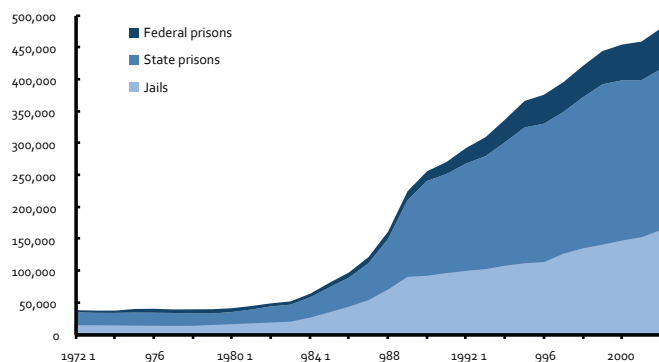
### Social impacts

- About 1 in 9 African American men aged 25 to 29 is incarcerated on any given day in the United States, mostly because of drug law violations <sup>14</sup>
- Drug-related crime, violence and corruption has destabilized entire countries such as Columbia, Mexico and Afghanistan <sup>15-17</sup>
- In Mexico alone, there have been 22,743 deaths due to drug-related violence since 2006 <sup>18</sup>

For more information, visit: [www.viennadeclaration.com](http://www.viennadeclaration.com)

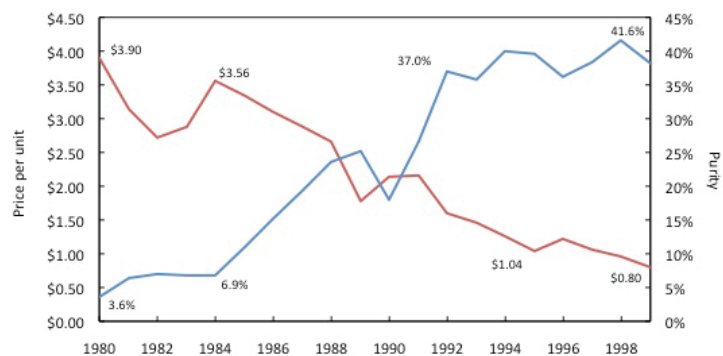
For video, visit: <http://bit.ly/warondrugsvideo>

### Estimated number of adults incarcerated for drug law violations in the United States, 1972–2002



Source: Data were extracted from Beck (1997), Beck & Glaze (2002), Cahalan (1986), Harrison & Karberg (2003), and Pastore & Maguire (2003) as described in Caulkins et al. (2006)

### Heroin price (red line) and purity (blue line) in the United States, 1980–1999



Source: *Briefing Book 2001* (Drug Enforcement Administration, Washington, DC)

“The criminalisation of drug users is fuelling the HIV epidemic and has resulted in overwhelmingly negative health and social consequences. A full policy reorientation is needed.”  
- Vienna Declaration



Police officers drive past a burning police vehicle in the Pacific resort town of Zihuatanejo, Mexico, on February 25, 2009. Earlier, gunmen opened fire and hurled grenades at the patrol car, killing four officers. (AP photo / Felipe Salinas)

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