



# DRUG POLICY REFORM & ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

**INTERNATIONAL COALITION**

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**Press Release: 26th June 2023.**

**The International Coalition for Drug Policy Reform & Environmental Justice collective statement in response to the UNODC 2023 WORLD DRUG REPORT Special Booklet on the Amazon Basin ‘ Drugs & Crime’.**

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We are on the eve of a tipping point in protecting the Amazon—a crucial global carbon “sink”, the Earth's largest ecosystem, and home to over 500 indigenous communities. Yet international efforts to achieve public and planetary health in the region are being eroded by the UN's enforced policy of Prohibition.

In 1978 the foreign ministers of eight Amazonian countries came together to sign a treaty aimed at cooperation to safeguard the region's natural resources and improve the lives of the local communities. Forty-five years on and the region is in crisis. The Amazon rainforests and its people face increased challenges, including ecological destruction and violence, fuelled in part by the prohibition of drugs. If we fail to address and redress the far reaching consequences of

prohibition, we will be unable to protect the Amazon and deliver climate justice, sustainable development and peace in the region.

The 2023 World Drug Report Special Booklet on the Amazon highlights the surge in drug cultivation, trafficking, and crimes affecting the environment within the Amazon Basin. According to the report, this surge can be attributed, at least in part, to a combination of abundant natural resources, limited state presence, persistent corruption, and structural factors such as informality, inequality, and unemployment. However, the report fails to acknowledge the critical role played by drug prohibition in enabling illegal drug markets and in creating the criminal syndicates; it overlooks the responsibility of prohibition in creating incentives for over-accumulation of capital, hyper-financialization and accelerated extraction of natural resources. The practices of land grabbing, illegal mining, illegal cattle ranching, and deforestation are made possible by the financial support and corruption derived from the illegal drug trade. It serves as a crucial factor in their success.

The report acknowledges that local communities may indirectly facilitate criminal operations due to the employment opportunities they generate. It should equally recognize that prohibition is the primary driver behind those thriving illegal drug markets. Unfortunately, the report neglects to honestly discuss the impact of drug prohibition on environmental crimes. According to Daniela Dias, Project Coordinator at SOS Amazonia, Brazil, the “***alarming reality of the Amazon requires a unified and compassionate response that understands not only the territorial structure but also the cultural one. Prohibition has established a powerful unregulated shadow infrastructure. How can we as Environmental defenders contend with this? We need to rethink our drug policy model with sensitivity, seeking effective approaches.***”

It is clear that the decades-old war on drugs has produced nothing but violence and inequality, as highlighted by [UN experts that are now calling for its end](#). Therefore, it is high time for a new approach—one that challenges the status quo and prioritizes sustainable policies over the failed, prohibitionist agenda that not only yields inefficiency but also comes with substantial social and environmental costs. New perspectives must recognize the everyday, racialized, gendered and uprooting violent character of drug production but especially of the War on Drugs. As long as this group of violences act together, territories such as the Amazon will continue to be prey to the rapacious interest of capital.

The salvation of the Amazon lies in the courage of member states to forge a new path, abandoning outdated practices and embracing the legal regulation of the drug trade. This will help to restore legal rights and accountability to people as well as to protect the Amazon rainforest so crucial to our global future. Without this much-needed shift, Amazon's future is grim.

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### Members of the Coalition

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A coalition of advocates, activists, artists and academics aiming to raise awareness of the environmental impact of current drug policy by centering the voices of those from impacted regions.