

By Neil McKeganey Posted 10th September 2014

The loftily entitled Global Commission on Drugs has just released a new report, “Taking Control: Drug Policies that Work”, which has garnered disproportionate media coverage. For those who are unaware, the Commission is a collection of ex-political leaders and the entrepreneur Sir Richard Branson, all of whom are promoting the legalisation of all currently illegal drugs.

This is a policy that they push on the basis, so they claim, of massive evidence of the failure of the “war on drugs”- evidence that somehow eluded them when they occupied high office and that equally strangely manages to elude those who currently occupy those positions.

This is a Global Commission name only. It has no representatives from Africa, China, Russia, India or the Islamic world. Its advice on drugs policy is that drugs should be regulated by governments across the world irrespective of their political, ethical, religious, philosophical, and moral colour or the nature of the drug problem they are dealing with, or the drugs treatment infrastructure they have in place.

This is a single-issue lobby group with a one size fits all drugs policy. The Global Commission is, in other words, drugs legaliser Number One. Its advice is so patently absurd that were it not for the high office its commissioners once held, it is hard to see that it would have attracted a fraction of the media coverage it has secured for its latest legalisation treatise.

The Commission promotes its solution to the world’s drugs problem on the back of a series of un-evidenced claims that huge (but unspecified) numbers of addicts are having their human rights abused, are being jailed for no offence other than drugs possession and, shock horror, are being forced into treatment. The reality is that whatever happens elsewhere in the world there are virtually no addicts in the UK who are jailed for simple drugs possession, and often the only constraint that is brought to bear on them is the threat of being sent to jail or being required to undergo treatment as a response to their repeat offending.

For the Global Commission all this amounts to a violation of the addict’s human rights - far better it seems to allow the addict to wallow in his or her own misery till the point at which they decide to get treatment. Far better, that is, unless you happen to be the victim of drug-related crime or the child of a hooked parent, who cares more about the powder being shot into their veins than your need for a safe and nurturing home life.

The thinking behind the Global Commission's report is so deeply flawed it hurts. Within the UK the latest drugs disaster has to do with legal highs - the number of deaths linked to these drugs having risen by over 600 per cent in the last three years. This is the frontline in our drugs problem and the drugs are - you guessed it - legal. This then is the embodiment of the Global Commission's "wise" counsel: legal drugs for everybody, available everywhere, without any fear of prosecution. Only trouble is the drugs are actually very harmful.

New Zealand tried to go down the route of licensing the legal high shops only to find that the drugs that were being sold were so dangerous they needed to shut the shops down forthwith. Portugal, so often trumpeted by the legalisers as the Mecca of their cherished policy, similarly banned the sale of legal highs. Ireland has done the same.

Prohibition, it turns out, has a great deal to commend it when the drugs being sold are actually killing people. In the event that any Government were so foolish as to follow the Global Commission's flawed advice, expect to see a worsening not improving drugs problem.