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interCambiando
IDEAS FOR DRUG POLICY REFORM



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Editorial

Expectations for SEDRONAR renewal

First two months of 2012 anticipate a year of tensions between different paradigms in drug policies implementation in Latin America.

While repressive operations in Brazil, such as "cracolandias" in Sao Paulo or the "Police peacekeeping forces" (UPP) in Rio, are sparking off various positions, in Mexico war continues multiplying the number of murdered people (which already exceeds the number of disappeared persons in Argentina during the last dictatorship), and in Peru the well-known expert Ricardo Soberón was dismissed as head of the agency on drugs (DEVIDA), in Bolivia the approval of a law legalizing Coca crops is moving forward, the president of Guatemala Otto Pérez opened the discussion about regulating traffic, and in Colombia a standing committee for decriminalization was created for the first time.

In this tension between paradigms, the question about Argentina remains opened after the recent appointment of Rafael Bielsa replacing José Ramón Granero as head of the Secretary for Prevention of Drug Addiction and Fight against Drug Trafficking (SEDRONAR). The expectations focus on which public policies will translate his management of a body that, as Intercambios Civil Association has mentioned before, faces a huge task in public health: 1) Promote to massively incorporate the primary care centers and hospitals as services for drug users, 2) Encourage harm reduction strategies that have proven effectiveness in improving the quality of life of drug users, 3) Support the development of low threshold services to assist drug users who are not willing to get into treatment.

Intercambios Civil Association hopes that the guidelines proposed by Mental Health Law, the jurisprudence of the Supreme Court in the "Arriola" ruling, and the prevention principles of the National Ministry of Education will be followed in this new stage.

Meanwhile, it is necessary that National Congress moves forward in the sanction of a new drug law that eliminates the criminalization of drug users. That is, policies that represent a comprehensive response in the frame of human rights and public health.

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Drug Policy in Argentina: changes in several agencies



New officials in different areas

Government new period brought the news of the arrival of former Foreign Minister Rafael Bielsa to SEDRONAR, changes in the Department of Mental Health and Addictions of the National Ministry of Health and movements in agencies of Buenos Aires province.

The appointment of Rafael Bielsa as head of the Secretary for Prevention of Drug Addiction and Fight against Drug Trafficking (SEDRONAR), replacing Jose Ramon Granero, was the most important news known in recent months in the field of drug policy in Argentina.

During his first weeks of administration, Mr. Bielsa had an intense activity, including meetings with various stakeholders. One of them was the deputy Fabian Peralta (GEN party), who served as head of the Commission on Prevention of Addiction and Drug Trafficking Control until last December.

Bielsa had a meeting with the Minister of Justice and Human Rights Julio Alak and they agreed on the need that the State should deepen interdisciplinary work of all its agencies in "a central theme of the public agenda".

He also met with the Security Minister, Nilda Garre, and the Social Development Minister Alicia Kirchner, in order to harmonize national public policies on drugs. Bielsa met other officials as well: Esteban Righi, Attorney General, Jose Sbatella, head of the Financial Intelligence Unit (UIF), and Jose Luis Vignolo, General Director of International Affairs on Drugs of Foreign Ministry.

He also held meetings with civil society representatives including Intercambios Civil Association and the Network of Mothers and

Families of Victims of Drugs.

As Chair of the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Committee (CICAD), position he will hold during 2012, Bielsa received Ambassador Paul Simons, CICAD's executive secretary, to advance on the review of ongoing projects between the multilateral agency and Argentina.

Other changes

Innovations in SEDRONAR were not the only ones in State agencies related to drug issues. At the end of December, Yago Di Nella's resignation as Director of Mental Health and Addictions of the National Ministry of Health was accepted, and María Matilde Massa replaces him; she had previously served as National Director of Reference Centers Management of the Ministry of Social Development.

Finally, in the province of Buenos Aires, Carlos Sanguinetti, former head of Provincial Cancer Institute, replaces Gabriela Torres as head of the Undersecretary of Addictions Assistance (SADA). Also, this agency left the orbit of the Ministry of Social Development to return to the Ministry of Health of Buenos Aires.

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Latin America does not take vacations in drug issues

Debates and news in the region

[The operation against the "cracolandias" in Sao Paulo, the dismissal of Ricardo Soberón and CIDDH claim by the conditions of drug users who are hospitalized in Peru, the new Coca Law in Bolivia, Juan Manuel Santos' statements and the creation of a standing committee for decriminalization in Colombia, the controversy over the number of victims of the war on drugs in Mexico, and the statements of Milton Romani in Uruguay. From Montevideo to Mexico, read a regional overview of news about drugs.](#)



Brazil: operation against "cracolandia"

Through the military police, Brazilian government launched an offensive against drug trafficking in Sao Paulo area known as "cracolandia", which covers the neighborhoods of Santa Cecilia, Bom Retiro and República, located in the downtown district of the city. Besides dealers, hundreds of crack users live there in extreme unhealthy conditions. The operation was launched in the first days of January, and officials said that it has no scheduled end date.

The federal police force, in coordination with municipal and regional authorities of Sao Paulo, deployed a one hundred police contingent in the area. According to official sources, "the operation aims to halt the trafficking of drugs and other crimes, to favor a more safe and efficient cleaning services and also to allow actions of social and health systems' workers".

However, critics note that a comprehensive care network must be created to deal with the diversity of users' groups, while they denounce that users flee to police presence and are limited to change constantly to other zones.



Peru: change in DEVIDA and death of inmates

Ricardo Soberón's management as head of the National Commission for Development and Life without Drugs (Devida) was suddenly cut because of his differences with former Minister of the Interior and current President of the Ministers Council, Oscar Valdés Dancuart. The prominent expert, who had pursued a policy that was away of the militarization paradigms, was replaced by Carmen Masías Claux, generating concern between coca growers: "We predict that the appointment of Masías will not bring any good because she has advised NGOs against the coca leaf and she is an ally of the U.S. embassy," said Serafin Lujan, leader of the National Confederation of Agricultural Producers from the Coca Basins of Peru (CONPACCP).

On the other hand, the Center for Drug Research and Human Rights (CIDDH) issued a release in reference to the fire occurred in an informal care center for drug users, in San Juan de Lurigancho district, in which 26 inmates and a worker of the area died.

CIDDH warned that "the events reflect the absolute unwillingness of recent governments to address the addiction problems in Peru", and denounced the violation of the regulations for psychiatric hospitals, as well as the existence of more than 200 care and treatment addiction centers throughout the country that are unregistered, many of them without the right infrastructure or staff.

In those places, the situation borders on "open violations of human rights of the persons subjected to regimes (health and individual liberty), often in worse conditions than prison. Also, these centers operate in the informality and lack of protocols and models to ensure proper treatments that guarantee good assistance, rehabilitation and social reintegration of inmates" claims the release.



Bolivia: debates for the Coca Law

The Bolivian parliament is preparing to debate the new Law on Coca and Controlled Substances. Even though one of the positive aspects of the bill is a more closed definition of criminal offenses that prevent people with little relevance participation (many of them children) to be judged as the major drug traffickers, it "maintains the same highly repressive and punitive approach establishing elevated and disproportional punishment, pretending that this would reduce or eliminate drug trafficking", according to Rose Marie Acha (Regional Coordinator of the Juvenile Justice Program in Bolivia).

On the other hand, the new regulation –that will replace the Law 1008 of 1988- considers the legalization of coca bush cultivation in eight provinces in the Departments of Cochabamba and La Paz, as well as declares four other provinces as "original" production areas. According to the bill, the provinces Murillo, Franz Tamayo, Muñecas and Caranavi, in La Paz, will be the "legal" new areas of coca production, while in Cochabamba, production will be "legalized" in the provinces of Chapare, Carrasco, Arani and Tiraque.



Colombia: Santos' position and a decriminalization committee

After several approaches to decriminalization positions, President Juan Manuel Santos said: "I do not disagree with that", referring to legalization as a solution to the problem of drug trafficking, but he conditioned his statement by clarifying that "this solution would be acceptable to Colombia, if the whole world does". Santos considered that it should no longer be a taboo subject and urged consuming countries to "sit down and discuss alternatives".

On the other hand, the former Minister of Labour and Social Security and also former general secretary of the Democratic Center, Carlos Bula Camacho, announced the creation of a national standing committee to promote legalization. The former official described Santos' proposal as "shy", he said that "there should be no further delays" and announced that the new committee will mount a wide campaign in international bodies such as UNASUR, OAS and UN.

Guatemala: decriminalize and regulate the production?

In mid-February 2012, Guatemalan President Otto Perez launched a campaign to regulate the production and consumption of some substances. "It is not a decision only of Guatemala, it is a regional decision" which will be discussed at the Presidents Summit in El

Salvador next April, assured the president. In a recent UN study, Central America appears as the region with the global highest rate of violent deaths related to organized crime. Yuri Fedotov, director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) criticized Perez's proposal, saying: "Central America needs more international support to fight drug traffickers, and measures such as legalizing drugs would only aggravate the problem", he said.



Mexico: demand for information on the number of victims

While official numbers show that since 2006, when President Felipe Calderon declared the war on drug trafficking, 47,515 people died from drug related violence, some persons have begun to question the data provided by the government. One of them is Eric Olson, a security expert at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington.

According to this researcher, "the government has some information and numbers that would be valuable and they are not being released". After providing numbers of victims until the end of 2010, the government refused to continue giving information, but later yielded to the pressure and reported about 12,903 deaths in the first nine months of 2011. However, there are many doubts on the veracity of those data. According to Olson, "there are things that are not well defined and can offer misleading conclusions."



Uruguay: "Leader in opening the debate"

Milton Romani, the Uruguayan ambassador to international organizations in the world drug problem, was interviewed by the newspaper La República. Among his remarks, he said that "the repression paradigm as the only way to fight drug trafficking has failed and Uruguay has become a leader to open debate and change the model of the so-called 'war on drugs', introducing ideas for changing approaches and generating significant supports".

Romani emphasized his country "behaves effectively against organized criminal groups and it has also kept in tone with what the international community demands on anti money laundering. We also defend the right to health of drug users; we have made great strides in that".

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Global Technical Meeting on Stimulant drugs use and HIV

Experts discussed in Sao Paulo

Convened by UNODC and during three days, a group of experts from around the world were dedicated to share knowledge and develop policies to recommend governments. The main theme: strategies for prevention of infections among injecting and non-injecting users of amphetamines, cocaine, crack or coca paste. Diana Rossi, from Intercambios Civil Association, was one of the participants of the meeting.

What is the nature of the relationship between stimulants and HIV transmission? What kind of interventions is needed to prevent transmission of infections among stimulants users? These questions were discussed by a group of experts from different regions of the world at a meeting held in Sao Paulo, Brazil, between 25 and 27 of January, convened by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

The vulnerability of users

The use of stimulants such as cocaine, crack, amphetamines and coca paste is proved in Latin America and the Caribbean, South and Southeast Asia, North and South Africa, Middle East and Eastern Europe.

In both Latin America and the Caribbean, several studies reveal the vulnerability to infection by HIV, or hepatitis B and C, of injecting and non-injecting users of cocaine, crack or coca paste. During the meeting, Diana Rossi, Marcus Day, Francisco Bastos and Tarcisio Andrade, among other experts, contributed their knowledge regarding the use of stimulants in the region.

Recommendations for governments

The meeting allowed organizing and discussing the information available on the use of stimulants, a concern in Latin America and the Caribbean. The objective was to generate recommendations for governments to consider planning, implementing and evaluating HIV prevention interventions aimed at people who use stimulants.

Global participation

Members of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), and the Brazilian government, that contributed to the organization, participated at the meeting, together with representatives of the International Network of People who Use Drugs (INPUD) and recognized researchers, as the North American Don Des Jarlais, Australian Alex Wodak and Netherlander Jean Paul Grund.

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Reflection on the role of school: Get mixed up to care them or to annoy them?

Get mixed up to care them or to annoy them?

Dealing with problematic drug use in schools



By Paula Goltzman (*) paulagoltzman@intercambios.org.ar

A few months ago, the executive team of a school located at Buenos Aires suburbs told us -Intercambios' Intervention Department- their legitimate concerns on drug use by some of their students.

They concerned themselves about how to get youth remain at school, how to help them without putting them under pressure, how to deal with so many things that did not work as expected, what to do with services, professionals and policies that seem not to be enough.

From school into the territory

Then we decided to face the task and join this team to think together a proposal to approach problematic drug use in the school. And here came the first definition of how we would address the problem: **the school is asking our intervention, but the school is not alone, and less, drug use does not only happen within it.**

So the intervention is not in the school -or rather it is not only in the school-, but the approach should be **from school into the territory** shared by the school, its students, their families, and the networks of friendly and not so friendly organizations. It is in this territory where specific resources, policies and their services, symbolic and cultural exchanges materialize daily.

After only four months, this reflection does not try, nor could, to report results, but it can outline some of the tensions that have come up. We share them with the belief that they can give clues to keep thinking our interventions in drugs field.

Care or annoyance?

First evidence: the role adults play in the relationship between youth and drugs. As teens say: "*There are adults who get mixed up for taking care, and there are adults who get mixed up for annoying*". Care or annoyance questions our interventions' direction; to what extent is our understanding of the meanings that drug use have for young people on the edge from where we become adults who annoy or who care? To what extent is the authority that respects oneself and the other, or is the arbitrary authority exercised without rhyme or reason, at the boundary between care and annoyance?

So when we think about adolescents' consumptions, we should look back to our role of adults and how we relate to drugs. We have said many times that the youth relationship with drugs **is not a relationship between two; it is a triad where adults are part of**.

Growing up, opportunities for learning, youth autonomy development are the responsibility of adults. If we do not review the way we encourage some substances consumption, we experience, use or abuse others, we are doomed to be part of that triad in a hypocritical way. Consistency and honesty are also part of that edge in which we become a trouble or a legitimate support for care.

Talk or listen and do?

Second evidence: repeated phrases such as "*I tell them about the dangers of drugs*", "*we did workshops about drugs*" put more emphasis on what adults believe that young people need to know about drugs, rather than what young people want to say about them.

The myth "*here the drug is not going to happen*" disappears in the everyday experience, although some ones still cling to it expecting to be fulfilled. Young people are in contact with drugs and they will experience them at some moment in their lives.

Perhaps it is more necessary to listen than to talk to youth, listen what they do and don't know and what they would like to know about drugs. The meanings and the stories about their own practices and about their peers give clues to think interventions. And we need to underline this: **It's not worth listening if it doesn't give us ideas for interventions**.

Listening will not be enough if we don't do it intentionally with the aim to take what the teens say into preventive, care and therapeutic actions. The question inevitably turns toward adults: **What do I do with what I listen?**

The thin line between public and private

Third evidence: about the management of information, about those who know, about those that believe they know, and about what we think everybody should know (or not). During these four months, different scenes turned around the management of information, what is said or not said about drug use and about those who use drugs.

On one hand, the staffs of the school feel impelled to join the objective: "*at the school, we will work with the drug issue*". And then it seems that "*everything is worth*" to address a "*preventive*" action. The intentions behind the promoted actions or their contents usually get blurred: **are moralizing speeches held, or on the contrary, is the intention to question to the teens and provide them with tools to manage the drug risks?**

Perhaps one of the challenges of the teams is to first agree: *what are we going to prevent of?* What elements are necessary to work on drugs problems? How do we solve the tension between "everyone knows something" about this matter and the required specialized knowledge for intervention? Or, how do we solve the inherent tension in a matter that moves, urges, shocks, but at the same time requires taking pause, prioritizing actions, reviewing what the shock challenges?

On the other hand, when information is flowing indiscriminately, it can produce harm. Enough has been said about the school as an integration space, and children and young people as subjects of protection. Under these arguments, privacy and intimacy have too thin borders.

Stigma, understood as a discrediting attribute that blurs any other attribute of the subject, operates as an identity label. What happens when an identity such as "addict" is installed in an adolescent still building his/her identity? What other attributes are parts of the life of teen using drugs? And what value do they have in our intervention, which are the benefits or damages of identifying those who experiment with drugs in an intervention process?

The school can make the difference

So far the train of thoughts to share three links evidently chained to what we call the process of intervention at school. Too many things have happened in too little time...pretty paradox!

We still have ahead a work process where the challenge will be to insist upon that, as adults, we have much to do with the problems youth have with drugs. Intervening in these problems is a process, and problematic drug use could be a conflictive situation in a moment of the life of these youth. The evolution of this situation is going to be affected by many circumstances, the school engaged (and not only concerned) to be part of those circumstances can make a difference. And we are accompanying that.

(*) Paula Goltzman is a social worker. She coordinates the Intervention Department at Intercambios Civil Association.

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TRAINING

Virtual course on Drug Policies, Human Rights and HIV

Organized by Intercambios and Punto Seguido, the virtual course on Drug Policies, Human Rights and HIV will be developed in eight weekly classes between March 14th and May 2nd. It is aimed to activists and professionals who work related to public policies and practices in drug and HIV issues as well as those people interested in the drug problem from a perspective defending human rights.

The proposal is based on the need to question the global approach to drugs to improve the responses. "In countries around the world, people who use illicit drugs often face situations of discrimination, rejection and violence that lead to violations of their rights. Many of these incidents are hidden or are justified on the grounds of "dangerousness" or "inability" of drug users; blaming them of the abuses they are subjected".

The course is supported by the Foundation Open Society Institute and has available scholarships for members of organizations and institutions related with these issues. To apply please ask for the form to lista@intercambios.org.ar or download it from our website www.intercambios.org.ar. The application forms will be received until March 2nd, 2012.

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BRIEFS

Basque Country: seeking to legalize user associations. With the support of all blocks of the Basque Parliament, a bill to regulate the operations of cannabis associations in this autonomous community was presented. The parliamentary groups based on the need to change the current situation. Since the law does not punish the use of cannabis, but it does its sale and cultivation when it is intended to traffic, a number of user associations which allow their members a regulated consumption avoiding this way the black market, have appeared in the recent years in Euskadi. However, the lack of a regulation of their activity makes these associations move into illegality and don't have legal security, a situation that the parliamentary groups are proposed to correct.

The German Parliament discusses the legalization of cannabis. A special committee of the Bundestag (lower house of German parliament), promoted by the Left party, discusses adopting a rule that allows the creation of specific places for smokers. The proposal plans to authorize the possession of cannabis for personal use (30 grams or less) and space for cultivating plants that could be sold to adult consumers. Other groups and leaders, especially the Bavarian Justice Minister Beate Merk, are opposed to it.

Association for Cannabis Studies of Uruguay (AECU) Launch. Last December the Association for Cannabis Studies of Uruguay (AECU) was put into operation. The new entity "calls for social action for the implementation of a new paradigm in drug policy that allows researching and further progress towards a more inclusive social and civil, humane and democratic model, based on an updated and accurate scientific discourse that respects human rights and constitutional guarantees of citizens". AECU's launching was held at the Legislative Palace and was led by former Judge Federico Alvarez Petraglia. "We demand legal recognition of the right to cultivate cannabis for personal consumption and possession, its regulation for therapeutic use, and the suspension in the application of art. 31 of the applicable law in cases of self-cultivation", he said.

Global Fund: Michael Kazatchine quits. After five years in this position, the executive director of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria resigned. The reason was the appointment of a general manager (Gabriel Jaramillo). It was so said by Kazatchine who, after admitting that the resignation letter that will be effective next March 12 had been "a difficult letter to write", pointed out: "In November, the Board decided to appoint a General Manager to oversee implementation of the Consolidated Transformation Plan who will report directly to the Board. I respect this decision and trust that it was made in the best interests of the Global Fund. I have reflected long and hard on the implications of this decision for me and for the organization. While I remain fully committed to the Global Fund and its mission, I have concluded that I should not continue as Executive Director in these circumstances". The developing countries NGO delegation to the Global Fund Board stated its backing and gratitude to the outgoing officer: "His unconditional support to civil society will remain in the Fund's structures, policies and actions, and in the communities it serves as well".

Documentary film on the war on drugs awarded in Sundance. The House I live In, a documentary film by Eugene Jarecki about the failure of the 'War on Drugs', has won the Sundance Film Festival 2012 in the U.S. Documentary category. The House I live In examines the cost of the war on drugs -not only the financial one but social and human as well- for the United States. When receiving the Grand Jury Prize, Jarecki referred to the "tragically immoral and heartrending wrong" war on drugs. The film includes interviews with prisoners, dealers, anti-narcotic agents, judges, and historians.

Offensive against the "coffee shops" in Holland. The Dutch government, led since 2010 by an alliance between liberal, Christian democrats and from the extreme right, have prohibited tourists enter to the famous "coffee-shops" to smoke hashish or marijuana. The measure shall take effect from May of this year in some areas of the country and in the whole country from next year. In addition, the legislation states that only Dutchmen or residents may enter with a card. And each coffee shop could have until 2000 members. Many city councils have warned that this measure will grow the crime and clandestine sale. Also, the government decided to reclassify potent cannabis as "hard drug", so that 80% of what is now offered at these places shall be prohibited. According to those who are opposed to this measure, "now the lighter cannabis will be sold to people over 18 in these coffee shops and the most powerful cannabis to the minors in the street". Finally, the coffee shops that are located within 350 meters of a school shall disappear during the next two years. Only 89 places will remain of the 223 coffee shops that currently exist.

Intercambios at a International Conference. Graciela Touz , president of Intercambios Civil Association, will be one of the speakers at the "3rd International Conference on Drug Dependence: Harm Reduction and rehabilitation: mutually exclusive or complementary models?" The event, organized by Proyecto UNO, will be at the auditorio of OSDE Foundation, C rdoba City, on April 13th. It will begin at 10 am and will be broadcasted via teleconference in OSDE associated subsidiaries. It is a free activity but previous registration is required. Ask for more information to: jornadas@proyectouno.org.ar or (54 11) 4798-7919/4792-9639.

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AGENDA

55th Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND)

Vienna, Austria, 12-16 March, 2012

<http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/commissions/CND/index.html?ref=menuaside>

XIV Ibero-American Workshop on Drugs and Cooperation

Santiago, Chile, 16-20 April, 2012

<http://www.riod.org/noticia.php>

Fifty First Regular Session of CICAD

Washington, D.C., United States

9-11 May, 2011

<http://www.cicad.oas.org/apps/EventDocuments.aspx?IF=US00AB&Lang=SPA>

Sixth Annual Conference of the International Society for the Study of Drug Policy

Canterbury, UK, 30-31 May 2012

<http://www.issdp.org/conferences.php>

XIX International AIDS Conference

Washington DC, United States, 22-27 July, 2012

<http://www.aids2012.org/>

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