



19.04.2016 – Current drug control policies have failed to protect public health, and in many countries drug control efforts result in serious human rights abuses: torture and ill treatment by police, mass incarceration, executions, extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detention, and denial of basic health services.

In an [open letter](#) , dated 15 April, UN experts urged states to adopt human rights approach, “We are concerned that the current international drug control regime remains excessively punitive. Most drug control policies at the national level are based on criminalisation, incarceration, and over-investment in law enforcement, which have proven to be serious barriers in the protection and fulfilment of human rights.”

This comes a day after a separate [open letter to United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon](#) , signed by more than 1,000 people, including financier Warren Buffett, U.S. Sen. Elizabeth Warren and rock star Sting, calling for a shift on global drug policy. Published on Thursday 14 April, the letter criticizes current global drug policy as being “Focused overwhelmingly on criminalization and punishment, [which has] created a vast illicit market that has enriched criminal organizations, corrupted governments, triggered explosive violence, distorted economic markets and undermined basic moral values.”

The letter signed by former presidents of Mexico, Colombia, Brazil, Switzerland and others, emphasized the need for a different approach: one that moves away from criminalization to one of “compassion, health and human rights.”

This focus on health and human rights was echoed by Michel Sidibé, Executive Director of UNAIDS. At the launch of a new UNAIDS report ‘ [Do no harm - Health, human rights and people who use drugs](#) ’ on 15 April, Mr. Sidibé said, “Health is a human right. Investment in people-centred policies and programmes for

people who use drugs is the crucial foundation for a global drugs policy that not only saves lives but is also cost-effective.”

The discussion around drugs in political and public discourse is gradually shifting and the UN General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Problem (UNGASS) is a timely forum in which to reflect upon the achievements and challenges of international drug policy. Tackling the World Drug Problem is vital in achieving the 2030 Agenda, especially [Sustainable Development Goal \(SDG\) 3](#)

which aims to ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all. The session will run from 19 to 21 April at UN Headquarters in New York, and will be broadcast live on

[UN TV](#)

. Follow the debate on social media with the hashtag

[#UNGASS2016](#)

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- [UNGASS](#)

- [Open Letter from UN Experts](#)

- [Open Letter to Ban Ki-moon](#)

- [UNAIDS](#)

- [Sustainable Development Goals](#)

Photo: [DFID](#) *A bag of seized heroin rocks with a street value of £70,000.*