

UNIS/NAR/1190
11 December 2013

Uruguay is breaking the International Conventions on Drug Control with the Cannabis Legislation approved by its Congress

VIENNA, 11 December 2013 (UN Information Service) – The International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) regrets that the legislation to legalize production, sale and consumption of cannabis for non-medical purposes approved yesterday in Uruguay contravenes the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, to which Uruguay is a party.

The President of the INCB, Raymond Yans said he was “surprised that a legislative body that has endorsed an international law and agreements, and a Government that is an active partner in international cooperation and in the maintenance of the international rule of law, knowingly decided to break the universally agreed and internationally endorsed legal provisions of the treaty”.

Mr. Yans also recalled that “the main aim of the 1961 Single Convention is to protect the health and welfare of humankind. Cannabis is controlled under the 1961 Convention, which requires States Parties to limit its use to medical and scientific purposes, due to its dependence-producing potential.”

According to the President, “the decision of the Uruguayan legislature fails to consider its negative impacts on health since scientific studies confirm that cannabis is an addictive substance with serious consequences for people’s health. In particular, the use and abuse of cannabis by young people can seriously affect their development.”

Cannabis is not only addictive but may also affect some fundamental brain functions, IQ potential, and academic and job performance and impair driving skills. Smoking cannabis is more carcinogenic than smoking tobacco. The President of INCB is therefore surprised that “available scientific evidence, including that presented to the parliamentary committees by Uruguay’s own scientific community, was not taken into consideration by the legislators” and that the stated aim of the legislation, to reduce crime, “relied on rather precarious and unsubstantiated assumptions”.

Such a decision “will not protect young people but rather have the perverse effect of encouraging early experimentation, lowering the age of first use, and thus contributing to developmental problems and earlier onset of addiction and other disorders,” Mr. Yans said.

The international drug control conventions recognize that drug dependent people need to be assisted with appropriate services and not be penalized. In fact, the Conventions recommend treatment, rehabilitation and social reintegration as an alternative to imprisonment.

The Board regrets that the Government of Uruguay did not respond to INCB to engage in a dialogue prior to further consideration of the law. In discharging its mandate, the Board is committed to an ongoing dialogue with all governments, including the Government of Uruguay, to ensure universal application of the three international drug control conventions. INCB reiterates its call to the Government of Uruguay to engage with the Board with a view to ensure that Uruguay continues to respect and implement the treaties to which it is a Party.

* * * * *

INCB is the independent, quasi-judicial body charged with promoting and monitoring Government compliance with the three international drug control conventions: the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances, and the 1988 Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances.

For further information, please contact:

INCB Secretariat

Telephone for media inquiries: (+43-1) 26060 4163

Email: [secretariat\[at\]incb.org](mailto:secretariat[at]incb.org)

Website: www.incba.org