

US WILPF Statement on Drugs Endorsed at the 3/1/2001 National Board Meeting.

Today our country is engaged in a 'war on drugs' which bears all the hallmarks of war: displaced populations, disrupted economies, terrorism, abandonment of hope by those the war is supposedly being fought to help, the use of military force, the curtailment of civil liberties, and the demonization of the 'enemies'.

The US Government's drug policy stands in opposition to the goals of US WILPF, as stated on the masthead of our newsletter, PEACE AND FREEDOM. We stand for the "equality of all people in a world free of racism." The 'Drug Policy' as implemented by state and federal authorities is highly discriminatory. While African Americans constitute about 12% of the US population and 13% of drug users, they make up 38% of persons arrested for drug offenses, 59% of those convicted of drug offenses, and 63% of those convicted of drug trafficking. Racial profiling had become endemic among police forces. The disparity in sentencing between crack and powder cocaine violations incarcerates far more blacks than whites. Thus, US drug policy covertly implements a racist agenda.

We believe in "building a constructive peace through world disarmament". Current American and UN anti-drug policy is founded primarily on coercion and violence. Over 1.5 million persons have been arrested annually on drug charges since 1996, more than twice the number arrested annually for the major violent crimes (murder, rape, robbery and aggravated assault) combined. This is the largest class of criminal arrests in the US each year, and almost 80% of these arrests are for simple possession. Over 400,000 persons are in state and local prisons and jails for drug offenses alone. Many of them are young people between the ages of 18 and 24. Violent- and unconstitutional – drug raids on homes by heavily armed 'SWAT' teams have become a common occurrence in poor neighborhoods. In addition, the government's anti-drug strategy of total prohibition encourages violence in the drug marketplace, and prevents non-violent dispute resolution.

There are profound international dimensions to this 'war'. Illegal drug trafficking finances covert action programs, insurgencies, paramilitary armies, and enormous violent criminal gangs. It has become the smokescreen for 1.3 billion dollars of primarily military aid to Colombia.

Finally, we seek to "change government priorities to meet human needs". We object to the notion that all people who use drugs are criminal. Addicts are people in need. The number of addicts needing treatment – the most effective way to reduce the costs and severity of the drug problem by reducing the number of hard core addicts – has been increasing, yet the government is failing to significantly increase treatment capacity. Almost three million hardcore drug addicts remain untreated each year. Yet the RAND Foundation has found that treatment is 23 times more cost effective in reducing crime than source eradication.

On the most important criteria – saving lives, keeping drugs out the hands of kids, hindering illegal drug traffickers, and treating those who are addicted – the failure of current US strategies is escalating. Meanwhile federal expenditures have increased from \$683 million in 1975 to 17.7 billion in 1999. \$19.2 billion has been requested for 2001. In 1995, over \$33 billion was spent by state and local governments to fight drugs, a sum that also grows steadily. The anti-drug effort is overwhelmingly an effort of police, prisons, and, outside the US, the military, intelligence agencies, and other law enforcement agencies. The human needs of addicted people, and the communities they live in are degraded in the process. The policies of prohibition conflict with public health policies and lead to the spread of disease. They also lead to environmental degradation. The unregulated cultivation and processing of drugs is a major environmental problem.

Therefore: WILPF supports the concept that the 'war on drugs' is causing more harm than drug abuse itself. Prohibition is an experiment that has not only failed, but is too expensive to further

endure. We support approaches such as decriminalization or regulated legalization. The transition from an illegal to a legal market involves enormous unknowns and should be undertaken gradually and with a willingness to explore various alternatives.

We urge WILPF members working on our campaigns to draw connections between drug policy and racism, disarmament and globalization. We empower our ED to join coalitions working on alternative drug strategies. And we invite all WILPF members to actively reach out in their communities to groups that have been victimized by this 'war', to build a non-violent and safe response to the human need to change consciousness.