

Cannabis regulation and UN treaty reform

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The inclusion of cannabis in the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs as a psychoactive drug with “particularly dangerous properties” and hardly any therapeutic value was done on dubious grounds. Ever since, an increasing number of countries have shown discomfort with the treaty regime’s strictures through soft defections, stretching its legal flexibility to sometimes questionable limits. Forms of disobedience ranged from simply turning a blind eye to illicit cannabis markets, decriminalisation of possession for personal use, coffeeshops, cannabis social clubs and generous medical marijuana schemes. Today’s political reality of legal regulation of the cannabis market in Uruguay, Washington and Colorado, has changed the drug policy landscape and the terms of the debate. The question facing the international community today is no longer whether or not there is a need to reform the UN control system for cannabis, but rather when and how to do it. The policy trend towards legal regulation is expected to accelerate in the coming years and influence the agenda and outcome of the UN General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on drugs in 2016. How many breaches can the UN treaty regime sustain and how realistic are the options for systemic change?