

# The Makings of Brazilian Drug Policy



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A few years ago we looked at the situation in Brazil and thought that we were simply a country where drugs passed through. Drugs were produced on the slopes of the Andes in neighbouring countries and passed through here on their way north, east, or west, so we thought that we were merely a transit country. The reality – although we did not see it at the time – was that the logistics involved in moving drugs through Brazil were paid for by the drugs themselves. Today we are meeting here to deal with a problem that, in some ways, is a consequence of our lack of foresight in the past. The phenomenon of drugs is a worldwide phenomenon; a phenomenon of our times.

Speaking as President of the National Antidrug Council, it was with great pleasure that we agreed to partner this seminar, because we identified it as an excellent opportunity to reflect on and to share experiences. Here at this symposium, is a collection of the most important actors in the National Antidrug Council. The Minister of Justice, together with the Federal Police department and the National Public Security Secretariat (SENASP), act to reduce drug supply. Meanwhile, the Brazilian Office of Institutional Security and the National Antidrug Secretariat (SENAD) act to reduce demand. The Minister of Health, José



Gomes Temporão, who unfortunately cannot be here, is represented by others who share our view that the drug problem is fundamentally a public health problem, as reflected in our policies. Finally, I should mention one of the catalysts for this meeting, ICOS, which provides innovative ideas and proposals. These participants will all take part in presenting a multidimensional view of the drug phenomenon.

Our drug policy has come into being recently. Before 1998, Brazil did not have a national policy on drugs. It was only after the Special Meeting of the United Nations General Assembly, during which the principles for reducing drug demand in Brazil were discussed, that the first measures were adopted. The Executive Office of the National Antidrug Council became the coordinating body, and SENAD was made responsible for mobilising and coordinating different participants involved in creating a Brazilian policy. The National Antidrug Policy was thus instituted by presidential decree in 2002.

In 2003, upon assuming control of the Office of Institutional Security and the Presidency of the National Antidrug Council, we were given the challenging task by President Lula of constructing a new national agenda for reducing drug demand. In his message to the

National Congress at the start of his first term, the President stated our three main duties: first, to centralise efforts to integrate public sector policies with the National Antidrug Policy; second, to decentralise actions at municipal level, allowing demand reduction activities to be controlled by and adapted to local realities; third, to strengthen relationships with society and the scientific community, allowing greater participation from these two sectors.

Without doubt, the integration of public sector policy into the National Antidrug Policy was fundamental to the construction of the new agenda set by the President. By working together, we were able to coordinate the reform and creation of legal and institutional frameworks to guide government actions in reducing drug supply and demand. We were able to realign the National Antidrug Policy by implementing a process of wide-ranging popular participation and decentralised discussion sessions in Brazil's five regional areas. Participants at this conference will have the opportunity to learn more about this process and about the Policy, when the National Antidrug Secretary presents later on.

Through SENAD, we coordinated a government group that advised politicians on the wide-ranging legislative process that culminated in the Law on Drugs, sanctioned by the President in August 2006. This new law put Brazil in the spotlight on both the national and international stage with the creation of a National System of Public Policies on Drugs, replacing 30-year-old legislation that was out of touch with scientific advances and social transformation. The National Antidrug Council was restructured by decree, guaranteeing the joint participation of

government and society. The law also defined the scope for the bodies of executive power regarding actions to reduce drug supply and demand.

There were further advances in May 2007. Through a new presidential decree, we launched the National Alcohol Policy. This is a clear demonstration of responsibility and political will to deal with a complex and important issue. The National Alcohol Policy was the result of a long participative process with specialists and civil society. This was carried out through a forum on the national concept of drugs. This process allowed Brazil to come up with a policy based on realism, avoiding both fundamentalism and tolerance of consumption.

The new legislation is coming into effect quickly, with a provisional measure to prohibit the sale of alcoholic drinks along the federal motorway network, in a law drafted by six different ministries, fast-tracked to the National Congress to bring it into line with policy concepts on alcoholic drinks.

We want to reapply the concepts that went into crafting the Law on Drugs. The drug question is subject to strong feelings involving beliefs, ideology, and personal and family experiences, and we will achieve a common position between the different ministries. All of these ministries will certainly cede some of what they believe in order to achieve the political force necessary to confront the powerful lobbies that unite to avoid change.

We have also advanced a long way on the world stage. In the principle discussion forums, Brazil is known for its capacity to

produce and operationalise knowledge, and for being open to civil society participation when it comes to adopting national policy on drugs. We have cooperative agreements for ongoing partnership with international organizations and countries from the Americas, Europe and Africa.

As I said at the start, our National Policy on Drugs is new – it is not yet even 10 years old. Through presentations by the National Antidrug Secretary, the National Public Security Secretary and the Director General of the Federal Police Department, those present here will have the opportunity to learn about what has been achieved during this decade. However, these achievements do not mean we can consider our mission to have been accomplished. On the contrary, the phenomenon of drugs is of ever greater concern and requires ongoing efforts from all of us, government and society.