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Radical Drug Law Reform In The Spotlight

11 March 2008

Controversial law reform carried out in Canada and Australia to reduce the harm of illegal drugs and regain control of their supply is the focus of a Scottish Futures Forum event at the Scottish Parliament on Wednesday (12 March).

International drug expert Dr Alex Wodak, Director of St Vincent's Hospital Alcohol and Drug Service in Sydney, Australia will discuss how prohibition takes away a community's ability to control the supply of drugs and makes their export an attractive proposition to countries in the developing world, such as Afghanistan.

Dr Wodak, who has worked in Scotland and advises governments around the world on drug policies, established Australia's first needle syringe programme in 1986. He has also worked on the control of blood-borne diseases among drug users, such as HIV; something he argues is made almost impossible by existing drug laws.

Larry Campbell, a Canadian Senator, will talk about the politics of drug law reform, from his perspective as the former Mayor of Vancouver. Senator Campbell spearheaded the establishment of North America's first legal safe injection site, as part of the 'Four Pillars' approach to curbing drug abuse, which comprises prevention, treatment, harm reduction and enforcement.

Scotland's Futures Forum Director Robert Rae said:

"Over the last year the Forum has brought together experts from a number of countries and from across the UK to debate fresh approaches to reducing the damage to Scotland's population through drug and alcohol misuse.

"To date, this debate has taken place against the backdrop of the current legal and regulatory framework. This research, however, will look at how other countries have used quite radical law reform to tackle drug abuse."

Danny Kushlick from the UK Transform Drug Policy Foundation will set the scene and introduce Dr Wodak and Senator Campbell. The Foundation is a charity campaigning for an effective system to regulate and control drugs at local, national and international levels to replace the existing prohibition framework.

Background information on the 'Fresh Perspectives on Alcohol and Drugs' project

Holyrood's think-tank, Scotland 's Futures Forum, is carrying out an innovative study into alcohol and drugs use in Scotland . The aim of the project is to look at the following question: "How can Scotland reduce the damage to its population through alcohol and drugs by half by the year 2025?"

The Forum seeks to stimulate open and honest debate on the causes and impacts of drug and alcohol misuse across Scottish society. The study will consider the views of local communities, a wide range of harm reduction measures, the role of poverty, and review international best practice.

The project aims to inform public policy debate and challenge policy makers to consider new long-term approaches to problematic alcohol and drug use. The project is due to be completed in June 2008.

Background information on Scotland 's Futures Forum

Scotland 's Futures Forum was created by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body in August 2005. The forum aims to identify key challenges facing the nation and stimulate debate between MSPs, academics, civic society , wealth creators and international organisations on the ways of meeting them.

For more information about Scotland 's Futures Forum see:

www.scotlandfutureforum.org

www.scottish.parliament.uk/nmCentre/news/futuresforum_news.htm

Media access

Members of the media are welcome to attend this event, which is taking place in Committee Room 2 of the Scottish Parliament and should contact Kallon Basham on 0131 348 6088 or kallon.basham@scottish.parliament.uk.

Dr Wodak will make his presentation entitled 'Reducing Damage by Drug Law Reform' at 2.15pm followed by a question and answer session; while Senator Campbell will discuss "The Politics of Change" at 4.30pm , also followed by a question and answer session. Danny Kushlick will introduce the day's discussion from 1.45pm .

Photography :

Photographs will be available afterwards by contacting the Scottish Parliament's Media Relations Office on 0131 348 6269 or photography@scottish.parliament.uk.

Media access:

Media interested in attending should register by calling Steven Kidd, Scottish Youth Parliament Communications Officer, on 0131 313 6829 or 07917 107 123 or by emailing: steven.k@scottishyouthparliament.org.uk

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