

*Embargoed until 00:00 on 12 September 2023*

**Governments have used aid budgets to fund the global war on drugs: new report**

**Aid donors including the US, UK, EU and Japan spent close to $1 billion on the global war on drugs in a decade.**

**Tens of millions of dollars of aid have been spent in countries that have the death penalty for drug-related offences, including Indonesia and Iran.**

**Tuesday, 12 September 2023 (London, UK)**– Wealthy governments spent close to $1 billion from their aid budgets – intended to help end poverty and do no harm – on the global war on drugs, between 2012 and 2021

New research by Harm Reduction International released today reveals how dozens of donors, led by the US and the EU, have used international aid funding for activities related to narcotics control in the decade from 2012 to 2021.

Beneficiaries have included police forces and prosecutors’ offices around the world. Funded projects have included some which increase surveillance and arrests. At least $70 million of overseas development aid was spent in countries that have the death penalty for drug-related offences, including in Iran (which executed at least 252 people for drug offences last year) and Indonesia. Using the death penalty for drug offences is a violation of international human rights law.

“International aid is supposed to help end poverty and support development, not fuel human rights violations,” said **Naomi Burke-Shyne**, Executive Director of Harm Reduction International. “Using aid budgets for drug control doesn’t help meet development goals. These funds are being used to increase policing, surveillance, and arrests of vulnerable people and communities. Drug control must have no place in the future of aid,” she added.

 “The war on drugs has failed. Governments need to ensure that development assistance budgets are used to promote people’s health and human rights, and not to fund repressive drug control policies which have proven to be harmful and ineffective”, said **Helen Clark**, Former Prime Minister of New Zealand and current Chair of the Global Commission on Drug Policy. “It is particularly abhorrent that development assistance is applied to so-called narcotics control activities in countries which continue to execute people for drug-related offences”, she added.

The report, *Aid for the War on Drugs,* follows aid money for narcotics control including to specific projects around the world. It calls on governments and donors to divest from punitive and prohibitionist drug control regimes which undermine their other health and human rights commitments, and invest in evidence-based programmes such as harm reduction.

More than half of total aid funding for narcotics control over the past decade came from the US ($550 million), followed by EU Institutions ($282 million), Japan ($78 million), the UK ($22 million), Germany ($12 million), Finland ($9 million), and Korea ($8 million).

While relatively small shares of overall aid spending, these funds still eclipse those spent on other areas of development assistance. For example, more aid globally was spent in 2021 on narcotics control ($323 million) than on school feeding projects ($286 million) or labour rights ($198 million).

In total, 92 developing countries are listed as having been recipients of aid funding for narcotics control. The largest single country recipient of this funding in 2021 was Colombia ($109 million), followed by Afghanistan ($37 million), Peru ($27 million) and Mexico ($21 million).

Such spending is out of step with health and human rights commitments. The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) includes decriminalisation of drugs in its Global AIDS Strategy, with targets to repeal punitive laws and policies, as well as to “scale up comprehensive harm reduction”.

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 Notes:

* The report, *Aid for the War on Drugs*, will be launched online on Tuesday, 12 September at 1PM BST. Register at [tinyurl.com/4fuv55a9](https://t.co/Jtk5J5T4Yf). It will feature the report’s author and advocates from Sri Lanka, Costa Rica and Nigeria, who will speak on the impact of this punitive funding on communities in their countries/regions.

Speakers:

* + **Naomi Burke-Shyne** (Executive Director, Harm Reduction International)
	+ **Claire Provost** (Investigative journalist, author of 'Aid for the War on Drugs' report)
	+ **Aniedi Akpan** (Executive Director, Drug Free and Preventive Healthcare Organization and Chairperson, Drug Harm Reduction and Advocacy Network, Nigeria)
	+ **Ambika Satkunanathan** (Human rights lawyer and human rights activist, former Commissioner of the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka)
	+ **Ernesto Cortes** (Drug user advocate and Vice Chair of the New York NGO Committee on Drugs)
* All $ figures are in US dollars, 2021 constant prices.
* Aid budgets have provided only a fraction of what rich countries have spent on international drug control activities. But they are supposed to be protected budgets with dedicated purposes to help, and not harm, poor communities
* Each year, aid donors report their spending to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)’s Development Assistance Committee which maintains its Creditor Reporting System (CRS). This analysis is based on the May 2023 update of this data, covering spending through the end of 2021
* The OECD currently includes narcotics control as an official sub-category of aid spending that donors can report, covering activities from police training to public awareness campaigns “to restrict narcotics traffic and in-country distribution.”
* While some donors have spent less of their aid money on such activities in recent year (such as the UK, which appears to have stopped it – at least temporarily), others have increased it (such as the US, where such aid spending on narcotics control activities’ rose significantly in 2021, in the first year of President Joseph Biden’s administration)
* The OECD’s CRS data is not always detailed. In some cases, information has been redacted. There are long-standing calls for greater aid transparency for these reasons

**About Harm Reduction International**

Harm Reduction International (HRI) is an international NGO using data and advocacy to promote harm reduction and drug policy reform. We show how rights-based, evidence-informed responses to drugs contribute to healthier, safer societies, and why investing in harm reduction makes sense.

For more information, see: [www.hri.global](https://hri.global/)

**About the Global Commission on Drug Policy**

The Global Commission on Drug Policy - established in 2011 - has 29 Commissioners from around the world who, aware of the failure of the current international drug control regime, lend their voices and political and social influence, to raise drug policy issues across all levels. It is an independent, non-partisan and non-profit organisation hosted by the [Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies (IHEID)](https://www.graduateinstitute.ch/) in Geneva, Switzerland.

For more information, see:[www.globalcommissionondrugs.org](http://www.globalcommissionondrugs.org/)