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ISSUE: Effects of Drug Decriminalization on Drug Abuse & Assessing the Current Situation of Modern Human Trafficking in Arabian and African Regions

Drug decriminalization, an act popular usually in western countries in especially recent times, is the act of making changes in laws and penal codes so that drug-related penalties are less harsh on individuals. “Less harsh” usually means reducing or removing prison sentences, heavy fines, and in some cases, completely removing the status of drug-related arrests as crimes, and thus removing drug-related write-ups from one’s criminal record. Instead of these punishments, users of narcotics are instead directed towards therapy to overcome what is usually addiction. It should be kept in mind that this type of decriminalization is usually done towards possession charges in lighter drugs such as cannabis, manufacturers and distributors, and possessors of heavy drugs such as methamphetamine may still face heavy punishment. The final goal of drug decriminalization is to save money and resources given to the judicial system, to duly reduce incarceration rates, and to also reduce rates of drug overdose, infection and other related negative health effects of drugs, by offering therapy to individuals. (1) In countries that have decriminalized drugs, in this example, Portugal, it has been seen that the levels of drug use has stayed about the same, however the rates of sicknesses such as HIV/AIDS has seen a decrease, along with a decrease in problematic and adolescent drug use. (2) Despite any and all positive effects that drug decriminalization may have, however, we, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia find it expressly unacceptable to even consider such an act, in a land such as ours. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is governed strictly by Shari’a law, which forbids any narcotic substances. Therefore, we have followed a strict code of punishing anyone found with drugs with prison sentences and death, and will for the foreseeable future.

(3 & 4)

Human trafficking can be defined as the act of transporting, harboring, recruiting, transferring, or sale of human beings by means of force, deception or fraud. (5) The objective of human trafficking can range from sexually exploiting victims, to using them as child soldiers, to removing their organs. Victims may alternatively be forced to conduct hard labor, or into marriage, usually with a fee involved, where a victim is practically being sold as a groom or a bride. (6) According to UNODC’s latest report on human trafficking, 10.2% of victims were forced to conduct criminal activity, 10.3% were subjected with a mixed a form of exploitation, 38.7% were subjected to sexual exploitation, and 38.8% were subjected with forced labor. 42% of human trafficking victims were found to be women, 23% men, and 35% children, being divided into 18% and 17% as girls and boys, respectively. It was also found that human traffickers use a higher amount of violence with women and children; with females being three times more likely to receive physical or extreme violence. (7) We, as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia believe for human trafficking to be one of the gravest issues currently present in our world, and with our increasing number of migrants, we are also seeing higher numbers of trafficking; which is why we are taking every measure we are able to in order to combat this issue. (8)

Many organizations, governmental and non-governmental alike, have they taken steps to alleviate parts of these issues in order with their beliefs. For instance, regarding the issue of drug decriminalization, the Swiss government has implemented a program which, while doing many other things, aims to set up medical centers where heroin addicts can take a daily dose of the drug under medical supervision, in a controlled environment. The goal of the program is to reduce drug-related deaths, and it has succeeded on that regard. Currently, some 1700 addicts are believed to be benefitting from the program. (9) Another organization that has been pushing for the decriminalization of drugs is the International Drug Policy Consortium (IDPC). The IDPC organizes events, courses, and gatherings regarding the decriminalization of drugs, and aims to educate the public on the possible positive effects of drug decriminalization. (10) Additionally, the United Nations (UN) has also taken action regarding the decriminalization of drugs. Mainly, the UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR) (11), UNAIDS (12), and UNODC have been publishing information regarding the positive effects of drug decriminalization, and aim to provide reliable information regarding the state of drug abuse and possible solutions regarding it. (2)

In the case of human trafficking, many organizations are also taking part to alleviate the issue as much as a possible. For instance, the Global Action against Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrant – Asia and Middle East (GLO.ACT Asia and Middle East) is a collaborative initiative between the UNODC and the European Union (EU) which is done also in partnership with the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The initiative aims to fund and aid governments and civil society organizations to organize interventions towards human trafficking, provide legislative review, and sustain cooperation. (14) Apart from this, however, one of the most important pieces of legislation against human trafficking would be the “Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime”. Part of the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, the Protocol is the first legally binding document with a definition of human trafficking. Adopted by the UN in November 2000 and with a current signatory party of 181, it aims to provide concrete punishments, definitions, and methods to put and end, or to start intervening against the issue of human trafficking. (15)

As for actions taken by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia regarding these issues, on the issue of drug decriminalization, we would like to state again that we are completely opposed to any actions taken to make access to drugs easier, or ones that reduce the punishments regarding drug possession, manufacturing, and distribution. We are in complete disagreement with the UN’s stance on drug decriminalization, and their pro-decriminalization attitude towards the global community. We have been governed by the rules of Shari’a since our founding, and continue to do so now. We will not change our stance towards drugs, and will continue to punish ones found guilty of any drug-related crime with sentences we deem fit, be it capital punishment or life in prison. (16)

On the case of human trafficking however, we would like to exercise a different attitude towards the UN. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as previously stated, has been working tirelessly to alleviate issues of human trafficking in our country. For instance, in the year of 2020, we collaborated with the UNODC to protect our then some 10 million migrant population against human trafficking. We have been working closely with border offices, airports, embassies and the media in order to combat any threats of human trafficking. We have established and standardised contracts for migrant workers, in order to combat possible abuse by employers. In addition, we launched a National Referral Mechanism (NRM), in efforts to make victim identification easier, and to make inter-agency communication and collaboration quicker, and more efficient. We are also taking strides to educate both the public on the issue of trafficking, and training further our pre-existing network of anti-trafficking officials. (8)

In conclusion, we, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia believe for the issue of drug decriminalization to be one that we plan to make no changes towards. The mere act of drastically reducing punishment for drug charges conflicts with what is our de-facto constitution. Therefore, we believe for the UN's actions on the topic to also be flawed, and their push for decriminalization wrong. We are, however, gravely worried about the issue of human trafficking, have been taking steps, and will continue to do so, in order to one day get rid of this issue once and for all. Especially concerning Arabian and African regions, we highly appreciate what is currently being done, and would like to further request that the countries being affected in these regions are provided with further resources and are able to update their legislation on the issue, so that we can work together to fix what is an issue that affects millions of lives.

Resources

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