

Should We Legalize Drugs?

That very question is being considered by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) – whose position is [described](#) as “key to changing government drug policies.”

Yesterday, Virgin Group founder and billionaire Richard Branson leaked UNODC’s briefing paper on the matter entitled, [“Decriminalisation of Drug Use and Possession for Personal Consumption.”](#)

The paper states that “decriminalising drug use and possession for personal consumption is consistent with international drug control conventions and may be required to meet obligations under international human rights law.”

According to the paper, the criminalization of drugs has resulted in:

- Drug users’ lack of access to sterile needles and treatment options for abuse.
- Unjust “exclusion from workplace, from education, from child custody and from health care.”
- Drug users being held in detention centers without their informed consent.
- The incarceration of millions – especially poor and minorities – for minor, non-violent drug offenses.

The paper concludes:

“[I]mposing criminal sanctions for drug use and possession for personal consumption is neither necessary nor proportionate. On the contrary, punishment aggravates the behavioral, health and social conditions of the affected people.”

Branson’s leaking of the paper is consistent with his long advocacy for the decriminalization of drugs. He instead favors

that drug use be treated as a “health issue.”

The basic mandate of government in a society is to promote the common good. When it comes to drugs, then, the big question is this: has the criminalization of drugs obstructed the realization of that common good more than their decriminalization would?