VETERANS ACTION COUNCIL

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Veterans Action Council's Written Contributions to the Expert Panel 2026

Core recommendation. The Expert Panel should recommend negotiations toward a new international drug-control framework that is fit for the twenty-first century: one that removes cannabis, coca leaf and opium poppy - and their naturally occurring preparations - from treaty schedules; replaces prohibition with proportionate public-health regulation; and expressly rejects the colonial assumptions and discriminatory burdens embedded in the present system. We, the Veterans Action Council (VAC), envision an international drug control treaty system that proactively protects public health from dangerous substances created in the process of developing new pharmaceuticals; is forward-looking rather than backward-looking; and is based on sound principles of human behavior and harm reduction, as well as being evidence-based.

The VAC is a nonpartisan, volunteer-led policy and advocacy body focused on improving health outcomes and access to care for U.S. military veterans. Comprised of veterans and experienced policy advocates, VAC engages constructively with regulators, lawmakers, and international institutions to provide grounded, real-world insight into how public health and drug policy decisions affect veterans.

VAC works at the intersection of veterans' affairs, public health, and evidence-based regulation, including responsible approaches to plant-based and integrative therapies. Active at the local, national, and international levels, VAC serves as a trusted stakeholder voice committed to transparency, scientific integrity, and collaborative policymaking that strengthens both veteran care and public trust.

VAC is very sensitive to both the benefits that all medicines, including plant-based medicines, can have and equally sensitive to how destructive drug dependency or addiction can be, and is very motivated to see a drug policy that operationalizes both concerns equally.

VAC believes that a good-faith effort to bring the treaty into being fit for purpose that starts with removing the plants from pillar drug status will engage the wealth of expertise present in the broader drug policy reform movement to assist.

Why implementation alone is no longer enough

Resolution 68/6 asks the Expert Panel for clear, specific and actionable recommendations to strengthen implementation of the three international drug-control conventions, other relevant international instruments and international drug-policy commitments. That mandate must not be read as requiring preservation of every inherited rule. When a legal system repeatedly conflicts with human rights, sustainable development, Indigenous rights, scientific evidence and the actual practice of States, the implementation problem is evidence of a design problem.

The conventions were assembled across different historical moments - 1961, 1971, and 1988 - before today's human-rights architecture, public-health evidence, regulated cannabis markets, environmental knowledge, and sustainable-development commitments had matured. Their accumulated structure treats fundamentally different things as though they demand the same international response: traditional plants, pharmaceutical medicines, synthetic compounds, problematic use, personal possession, and organized trafficking. A twenty-first-century framework must differentiate them.

What High Compliance establishes - and why rewriting remains necessary

Kenzi Riboulet-Zemouli's High Compliance demonstrates that the 1961 Single Convention is not the seamless prohibition instrument it is commonly assumed to be. Its detailed textual and historical analysis identifies deliberate gaps, exemptions, and silences. It argues that Article 2(9), read with Articles 20, 28, and 38, can support domestic legal regulation of non-medical cannabis where a State uses effective public-health and harm-reduction measures, maintains appropriate sectoral separation and reports relevant statistics to the International Narcotics Control Board.

This matters for the Panel in two ways. First, States should not be condemned as treaty violators merely because they regulate cannabis more effectively than prohibition permits. Second, a system that requires States to rely on contested legal interpretation to protect health, respect culture, and regulate an existing market lacks clarity and legitimacy. High Compliance offers a lawful bridge under lex lata; the Panel should use that bridge to reach lex ferenda: a transparent and democratically negotiated replacement framework.

The report also identifies an indefensible asymmetry. The residual treatment of "traditional" non-medical uses raises discrimination concerns and appears inconsistent with international protections for Indigenous Peoples, even while modern industrial uses may be defensible through Article 2(9). A post-colonial treaty cannot privilege newly commercialized Western markets while continuing to stigmatize or suppress the peoples and traditions from which knowledge of cannabis, coca and poppy originated.

Sustainable development must be the governing test

The Global Sustainable Development Report 2023 calls for transformation, not minor adjustment, when existing systems lock societies into harmful trajectories. Drug control should be evaluated against the whole 2030 Agenda, including health, poverty reduction, food security, gender equality, decent work, reduced inequalities, peaceful institutions, climate action and partnerships. The current conventions contain no operational mechanism to test their controls against these outcomes.

Prohibition can transfer wealth from small farmers and traditional communities to illicit markets and enforcement institutions; obstruct access to controlled medicines; expose people to unregulated products; intensify incarceration and stigma; and drive environmentally damaging eradication, displacement and illicit production. These are not external side effects. They are treaty-performance outcomes and must be measured as such. The Panel should therefore recommend a mandatory Sustainable Development and Human Rights Impact Assessment for existing schedules, control measures and future scheduling decisions. Where controls impede the Sustainable Development Goals or produce disproportionate harm, amendment or removal should follow.

Remove colonialism from the legal architecture

International controls over cannabis, coca and opium did not emerge in a neutral scientific vacuum. They developed through imperial governance, racialized narratives and negotiations in which colonized peoples and Indigenous communities lacked equal power. The 1961 framework preserved that hierarchy by demanding the elimination of certain traditional practices while protecting a licit pharmaceutical market largely controlled elsewhere.

Decolonization requires more than changing terminology. The new framework should recognize Indigenous Peoples as rights-holders and co-authors of policy; protect traditional, cultural, spiritual and medicinal relationships with plants; require free, prior and informed consent where rules affect Indigenous knowledge or resources; and create lawful pathways for traditional cultivators and small farmers to enter regulated national and international markets. Reparative development, benefit-sharing and protection against corporate appropriation should replace eradication and exclusion.

Actionable recommendations to the Expert Panel

1. Recommend that the CND and General Assembly convene an inclusive diplomatic process to replace, consolidate or fundamentally amend the 1961, 1971 and 1988 conventions.
2. Remove cannabis, coca leaf and opium poppy, together with naturally occurring preparations, from the treaty schedules. Permit States to regulate cultivation, production,

possession, use and trade under public-health, human-rights, environmental and age-protection standards.

3. Retain proportionate international controls for substances and activities presenting serious transnational risks, based on periodic independent evidence review rather than plant origin, tradition or moral disapproval.
4. Embed human rights, harm reduction, access to essential medicines, sustainable development and environmental protection as binding objects of the new framework, with measurable indicators and public reporting.
5. Create permanent voting representation for Indigenous Peoples, affected communities, people who use drugs, patients, small farmers, youth and civil society in treaty review, scheduling and implementation bodies.
6. Commission an independent historical and racial-equity audit of the international drug-control system and use its findings to guide reparative measures, including market access and development investment in communities harmed by prohibition.
7. Pending treaty reform, recognize and publish good-faith pathways for lawful national cannabis regulation consistent with the flexibilities analyzed in High Compliance, and refrain from treating such reforms as automatic noncompliance.

Conclusion

The measure of success in 2027 and 2029 should not be whether States can be brought back into conformity with a twentieth-century prohibition model. It should be whether the international community is prepared to build a coherent system that improves health and welfare, advances sustainable development, respects human rights and ends colonial discrimination. The present conventions have reached the limits of reinterpretation. The responsible path is to begin writing their replacement.

Key sources and submission information

CND Resolution 68/6 - Strengthening the international drug control system: a path to effective implementation: https://www.unodc.org/rddb/document/drugs/resolution/2025/68/68-6/p_classh1resolution_686pp_classh1strengthening_the_international_drug_control_system_a_path_to_effective_implementationp.html?lng=en

Commission on Narcotic Drugs - Expert Panel: https://www.unodc.org/unodc/commissions/CND/expert-panel.html

Global Sustainable Development Report 2023 - Times of Crisis, Times of Change: https://sdgs.un.org/gsdr/gsdr2023

High Compliance (full report): https://faaat.net/highcompliance

Electronic submission contact: unodc-sgb@un.org

Deadline and format: No later than Sunday, 15 November 2026; English or accompanied by an English translation; maximum 1,500 words. Confirm final procedural requirements against the official Expert Panel call before sending.

Suggested citation

Riboulet-Zemouli, Kenzi. High Compliance, a Lex Lata Legalization for the Non-Medical Cannabis Industry: How to Regulate Recreational Cannabis in Accordance with the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961. FAAAT Editions, 2022. https://faaat.net/highcompliance.

Independent Group of Scientists appointed by the Secretary-General. Global Sustainable Development Report 2023: Times of Crisis, Times of Change: Science for Accelerating Transformations to Sustainable Development. United Nations, 2023. https://sdgs.un.org/gsdr/gsdr2023.