

UN commission reclassifies cannabis, yet still considered harmful



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In reviewing a series of World Health Organization (WHO) recommendations on cannabis and its derivatives, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) zeroed-in on the decision to remove cannabis from Schedule IV of the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs — where it was listed alongside specific deadly, addictive opioids, including heroin, recognized as having little to no therapeutic purposes.

The 53 Member States of the CND, the UN's central drug policy-making body, voted to remove cannabis from that Schedule — where it had been placed for 59 years — and to which the strictest control measures apply, that generally discouraged its use for medical purposes.

With a vote of 27 in favour, 25 against, and one abstention, the CND has opened the door to recognizing the medicinal and

therapeutic potential of the drug, although its use for non-medical and non-scientific purposes will continue to remain illegal. According to news reports, the decision could drive additional scientific research into the plant's medicinal properties.

Intensive preparations

Back in January 2019, [WHO](#) unveiled six recommendations surrounding the listing of cannabis in international drug control treaties. While the proposals were presented for decision by the CND at its March 2019 session, many countries requested more time to study the matter and define their positions, according to news reports. Therefore, the vote followed two years of intensive and detailed consideration.

Among WHO's recommendations, it was suggested that cannabidiol (CBD) with 2 percent or less Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC, the addictive substance) should not be subject to international controls. Member States rejected that recommendation for a variety of reasons, including some Member States arguing that CBD is not currently under international control and there was, thus, no need for action. CBD has taken on a prominent role in wellness therapies in recent years, and sparked a billion-dollar industry.

Currently, more than 50 countries have adopted medicinal cannabis programmes while Canada, Uruguay and 15 US states have legalized its recreational use, with Mexico and Luxembourg having political debates as to whether to follow that path.

Where they stand

After voting, some countries made statements on their stances. Ecuador supported all of WHO's recommendations and urged that cannabis production, sale and use, have "a regulatory

framework that guarantees good practices, quality, innovation and research development”.

Meanwhile, the United States voted to remove cannabis from Schedule IV of the Single Convention while retaining them in Schedule I, saying it is “consistent with the science demonstrating that while a safe and effective cannabis-derived therapeutic has been developed, cannabis itself continues to pose significant risks to public health and should continue to be controlled under the international drug control conventions”.

Voting against, Chile argued, among other things, that “there is a direct relationship between the use of cannabis and increased chances of suffering from depression, cognitive deficit, anxiety, psychotic symptoms, among others” while Japan stated that the non-medical use of the plant “might give rise to negative health and social impacts, especially among youth”.

Complete statements from Members of the Commission explaining their respective votes can be found [in this link](#).