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For Immediate Release

Groups Put Pressure on Governments to Reform Harmful Drug Policies

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Amsterdam, 25 June — As the United Nations launches the 2009 World Drug Report this week, more than 40 international groups and experts worldwide today issue a call to action that presses governments to adopt a humane approach to drug policy.

The call to action, signed by the Transnational Institute (TNI), the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, former president of Brazil Fernando Cardoso, and others, urges governments to enact policies that are based on scientific and medical research rather than politics.

“A world without drugs will never exist,” said Martin Jelsma, coordinator of TNI’s drugs programme. “The principle of harm reduction should replace the ideology of ‘zero tolerance’. It offers a more pragmatic approach that favours policies capable of reducing drug-associated harm as far as possible, for the consumer and for society in general.”

Rather than receiving treatment, millions of non-violent drug users are languishing in prisons as a result of current drug policies. As the HIV and AIDS crisis spreads, policies that drive away drug users are creating public health disasters. The drug trade continues to grow while families are torn apart by the global war on drugs.

“Sanctions should be in proportion to the crime,” said Jelsma. “Many countries could learn from the positive example given by Ecuador, which issued a ‘pardon for mules’ in 2008. Those who had been arrested with a maximum quantity of two kilograms of any drug, who had no prior conviction, and who had completed ten percent of their sentence or a minimum of one year, were released from prison.”

It is time for governments to support needle exchange, substitution therapy, and decriminalization of possession for personal use. Drug control measures must respect human rights with penalties that are proportional and humane, and recognize that drug cultivation is primarily a development issue—not simply a security threat.

The call to action, along with full list of signatories, is available online at TNI’s:

<http://www.ungassondrugs.org/>

TNI Drugs & Democracy programme is one of the leading international drug policy research institutes and as a serious critical watchdog on UN drug control institutions.

<http://www.tni.org/drugs>