

## **Geoff Gallop appointed to eminent global panel on drug policy**

### **Australia's 'successes and failures' to inform worldwide drug debate**

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The Fair Treatment Coalition has heralded as an 'important breakthrough' the appointment of the first Australian to the eminent Global Commission on Drug Policy.

Emeritus Professor Geoff Gallop, former WA Premier and an advocate with Harm Reduction Australia, has been appointed to the commission. He joins an eminent panel of commissioners, including former international leaders Helen Clark, Jose Ramos-Horta, and entrepreneur Sir Richard Branson. The late Kofi Annan also served on the commission.

Dr Gallop said he was humbled to be appointed to the commission and he hoped now that Australia's experiences could contribute to the global debate of "what works and what doesn't work" when it comes to drug policy.

"It's important too, that we in Australia learn from the experiences of other countries, such as in Portugal where drugs were decriminalised and funding was boosted for harm minimisation and treatment services," he said.

"Portugal had a terrible heroin problem prior to these reforms. Today the number of deaths due to drug overdose in Portugal is 0.35 per 100,000. That is over 20 times less than the overdose death rate in Australia (7.5 per 100,000)."<sup>1</sup>

Dr Gallop said there were those who argue we should "just say no" to drugs and others that argue criminalisation reduces drug use.

He said around the world there were jurisdictions that had moved to decriminalise personal drug use and they had not experienced the subsequent expansion in drug use that was predicted by opponents. He said there were lessons here that Australia should heed.

"In the drug debate in Australia we have seen how policy can produce good results when informed by a human-centred, pragmatic approach," Dr Gallop said.

"Our country has in the past taken new approaches to tackling drugs such as the establishment of a pioneering needle exchange program and the creation almost 20 years ago of the Uniting Medically Supervised Injecting Centre at King Cross."

Fair Treatment spokesman, Doug Taylor, said Dr Gallop's appointment was extremely significant and could help efforts for drug law reform in Australia.

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<sup>1</sup>Kristen Smyth and Susanne Porter, Why we need to change our approach to people who need treatment, October 2018, p 9. [http://www.fairtreatment.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/FT\\_DOCV2.pdf](http://www.fairtreatment.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/FT_DOCV2.pdf)

Fair Treatment is a coalition of more than 60 health, legal, community, union and church groups that is advocating for better and more funding for treatment services and for the decriminalisation of drugs in small quantities.

The coalition was created by Uniting (the service and advocacy arm of the Uniting Church in NSW and ACT) following an historic resolution by the church in 2016 – in which it became the only church in the world to adopt a position to decriminalise personal drug use.

The purpose of the Global Commission on Drug Policy is to bring to the international level an informed, science-based discussion about humane and effective ways to reduce the harm caused by drugs and drug control policies to people and societies.

**Dr Gallop is available for interview**

**Media contact: Martin Thomas 0477 340 704**