

# ➤ The International Drug Control System<sup>1</sup>

## **1907: Ten Year Agreement**

- Britain, China and India agree trilateral framework for ending Indian opium exports to China within ten years.
- Agreement becomes model for future supply control system.

## **1909: Shanghai Opium Commission**

- Initiated under American leadership.
- First truly international drug control meeting.
- The Great Powers examine ways to suppress international opium traffic – particularly traffic bound for China.
- Largely ends in discord but leads to 1912 Opium Convention.

## **1912: Opium Convention**

- Beginning of international drug control system.
- States encouraged to end drug abuse. Remains vague on mechanisms to achieve this.
- Signatories must prevent shipment of opium to states which bar its entry.
- Entered into force in 1919.
- Co-opted into new League of Nations.
- United States' leadership undermined by its ambiguous relationship with League administered system.

## **1925: Geneva Opium Conventions**

- Establish first mechanisms to enforce supply control framework.
- Permanent Central Opium Board (PCOB) created to monitor international imports and exports of narcotics.
- United States fails to secure end to all 'non-medical and scientific' drug use. Walks out of proceedings and never signs.
- Treaty gains widespread adherence over time.

## **1931: Conventions**

- United States cooperates with UK, Germany, and other industrialised states to fashion a workable control scheme.
- First introduction of schedules into international treaties.
- Creation of system of estimates. Administered by Drug Supervisory Body (DSB).
- Formalises international distinction between licit and illicit drug trades.
- Both PCOB and DSB function as quasi-judicial bodies independent of League of Nations.

## **1936: Convention**

- Aimed at suppressing growing illicit traffic.
- United States again fails to successfully advocate for end to all 'non-medical and scientific' drug use. Its delegates withdraw active cooperation for remainder of treaty negotiations.
- Eventually ratified only by Canada and a few other minor states. Never comes into force.

**1939-40: States consider negotiating international supply control agreement. Interrupted by WWII.**

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<sup>1</sup> This overview is drawn from various sources. For a history of the international drug control system see: William B. McAllister *Drug Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century, An International History* (Routledge, 2000)

### **1939-1945: WWII**

- Certain PCOB, DSB and League functions transfer from Geneva to Washington. Continue to function (minimally) throughout war.
- United States extracts commitments from Britain and the Netherlands to end opium monopolies in the Far East. Exceptions remain. French follow suit in 1945.

### **1945-6: United Nations becomes new custodian for administration of existing treaties.**

- Continuity with pre-war system maintained.

### **1948: Convention**

- Brings synthetic narcotics under international control.

### **1953: Opium Protocol**

- Prescribes more severe limitation of agricultural production of opiates.
- Forced through by the US, France and other allies.
- Rejected by agricultural producing countries and had little hope for gaining widespread acceptance.

### **1961: Single Convention**

- Unifies previous Conventions (except 1936) into one document.
- United States works to thwart its ratification, and instead bring 1953 Protocol into force.

### **1964: Single Convention enters into force. US initially refuses to ratify.**

- PCOB and DSB are merged into International Narcotics Control Board (INCB). Retains a 'quasi-judicial' role.

### **1967: US ratifies Single Convention.**

### **1971: Convention**

- Brings Psychotropic (psychoactive) substances under international control, but in a less stringent form than applied to opioids, coca and cannabis.

### **1972: Protocol Amending the Single Convention**

- Product of US efforts to strengthen Single Convention and INCB.
- Six decades after first Opium Convention, international system remains overwhelmingly focused on supply control issues.

### **1972: UN Fund for Drug Abuse Control (UNFDAC) created.**

- Nominally independent but reliant on US patronage.
- Heavily supply control focused.

### **1988: Convention**

- Primarily aimed at tackling organised crime and trafficking.
- Addresses demand issues by recommending criminalisation of personal consumption.

### **1998: United Nations General Assembly Special Session**

- Commits states to massive reductions in drug use and supply within ten years.
- Slogan: 'A drug free world. We can do it!'

### **2009: UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon claims criminalisation of injecting drug use is hampering HIV/AIDS fight. Calls for decriminalisation.**