

In many countries around the world, drug control efforts result in serious human rights abuses: torture and ill treatment by police, mass incarceration, extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detention, denial of essential medicines and basic health services. Drug control policies, and accompanying enforcement practices, often entrench and exacerbate systematic discrimination against people who use drugs, and impede access to controlled essential medicines for those who need them for therapeutic purposes. Local communities in drug-producing countries also face violations of their human rights as a result of campaigns to eradicate illicit crops, including environmental damage, displacement and damage to health from chemical spraying.

These abuses are widespread and systematic. They are cause for considerable concern in themselves, but they are also impeding an effective response to the AIDS epidemic by denying people who use drugs access to proven, effective HIV prevention, care, and treatment services and by contributing to at least one million people living with HIV/AIDS going without adequate treatment to address moderate to severe pain.

It is not enough to apply the drug conventions in a vacuum. Every UN Member state has ratified at least one of the core human rights treaties. Most have ratified many more. Every state is bound by UN Charter obligations in relation to human rights, and every state is bound by customary international law. As such, these issues raise considerable legal and strategic questions for states seeking to live up to their international human rights and drug control obligations.

Increasingly, human rights monitors, mechanisms and NGOs have begun to focus on drug policies and their impact on human rights protections, but this rarely happens in a connected or thematic way. These briefing papers are intended to provide a basic overview of some of the core human rights issues related to drug control efforts and to show how they interconnect, and to spark a discussion of how international human rights law can be engaged to address a range of human rights concerns raised by drug enforcement laws, policies, and practices.

Briefings:

1. Harm Reduction
2. Drugs, Criminal Laws and Policing Practices
3. Harm Reduction in Places of Detention
4. Compulsory Drug Treatment
5. Controlled Essential Medicines
6. Crop Eradication