

## Addressing the barriers to talking about drugs

We recognise that talking about drugs and all the options for drug law reform can feel unfamiliar and uncomfortable. Here we aim to address some of the challenges and misconceptions about drug policy reform.

### Talking about drugs is awkward and uncomfortable

You are not alone. One of the most persistent and damaging aspects of prohibition is to fuel stigma and to demonise those who are in any way involved in drug markets – as producers, traders, or consumers. This stigma can leak into the policy arena, repelling organisations that should otherwise be talking openly about the harms of the global response to those markets – the ‘war on drugs’ – including its serious harms to public health, human rights and the environment.

### This seems like a racial issue, not an environmental one

In fact, these are one and the same. The ‘war on drugs’ has always been a racialised war.<sup>124</sup> Reforming global drug prohibition therefore aligns closely with climate justice, which is rooted in anti-racism and in ensuring that solutions to the climate crisis create a more just society for everyone, especially marginalised communities.<sup>125</sup> Drug prohibition is the knife edge of institutional racism and therefore incompatible with climate justice. Climate justice requires collaboration between groups, including advocating for things perceived as outside one’s ‘remit’ in solidarity.<sup>126</sup> Considering the way drug prohibition harms communities and undermines environmental progress detailed in this report, it is clear how drug policy reform is an essential part of environmental and anti-racist work.

### Isn’t demand for drugs the real issue?

People have always used drugs—including risky but legally regulated drugs like tobacco. While there are, of course, very real health and social challenges related to use of both legal and illegal drugs, the key problem here is not that drugs are being produced, traded, or used per se. It is that the production, supply and use of certain drugs is globally criminalised. Rather than eradicating illegal drug use or drug markets, drug law enforcement instead drives those activities underground.

### Shouldn’t the focus be on the corrupt governments that are allowing environmental destruction?

It’s important to identify and denounce corruption, but it’s even more important to identify and target its key structural drivers, specifically how much corruption is enabled and resourced by the billions of dollars generated for organised crime groups by prohibition and the illegal drug trade it enables.

### Aren’t corporations the real threat?

Much environmental devastation can be traced to legal corporate agribusiness, mining, and infrastructure development. In the world’s tropical frontiers, however, it can be virtually impossible to distinguish between legitimate and illegal businesses: lands grabbed by criminal actors can be acquired, arms-length, by corporations; illicit capital can be laundered through legal companies. Holding corporations environmentally accountable, therefore, must include shedding light on the many ways in which they are subsidised and enabled by the illegal drug trade.