

03-GS-45 VOTED: The Twenty-fourth General Synod adopts the resolution “Confronting Racism and Militarism in U.S. Drug Policy.”

CONFRONTING RACISM AND MILITARISM IN U.S. DRUG POLICY

WHEREAS, racism and militarism continue to exacerbate rather than heal the problem of drug abuse and its impact on all of our communities; and

WHEREAS, the emphasis of the United States war on drugs continues to be placed on the production and supply of illegal substances rather than focusing on the demand for drugs in our own land; and

WHEREAS, according to federal statistics, 72 percent of all users of illegal drugs are white, 15 percent are African American, and 10 percent are Hispanic; however, African Americans constitute 36.8 percent of those arrested for drug violations and over 42 percent of those in federal prisons for drug violations. African Americans, Latino and Latina Americans, Asian Americans, and American Indians account for nearly 80 percent of those in state prisons for drug felonies; and

WHEREAS, the justice system is racially biased and includes racial profiling, prosecutorial discretion, gross disparities in sentencing, and mandatory minimums that unfairly offer privilege to white offenders while resulting in harsher penalties for people of color and greater hardships for their families; and

WHEREAS, the war on drugs has been especially harmful to American Indians on tribal lands who are subject to federal, not state, laws, and those arrested for even minor drug offenses must be processed through the federal court system, meaning that American Indians now comprise almost two-thirds of those prosecuted for criminal offenses in federal courts; and

WHEREAS, the poor and people of color in the United States and those who live in poor nations are the ones who are continually stigmatized in media and culture as the reason for our nation’s drug problems, despite empirical data that proves otherwise; and

WHEREAS, U.S. drug policy has been approached primarily as a law enforcement issue that has resulted in record arrests and incarcerations, while continuing to neglect the growing need for accessible and affordable medical treatment for drug users; and

WHEREAS, the chronic number of middle-class and wealthy white persons who are self-medicating through the use of illegal drugs underscores the spiritual aridity and emotional disease in our culture; and

WHEREAS, two-thirds of the federal drug control budget now funds interdiction and law-enforcement programs, while treatment, prevention,

research, and education divide the remaining federal dollars; and

WHEREAS, more than half of those who request drug treatment services are denied access due to space limitations or high costs; and

WHEREAS, U.S. State Department figures show coca production increasing in Colombia by two hundred sixty-eight percent since large-scale spraying started in 1995, and for every acre of coca eradicated in southern Colombia, three acres of Amazon rain forest are cut down to replace them; and

WHEREAS, gross economic disparities in our nation and around the world are the root cause of illicit drug sales, and eradication efforts have led to an increased militarized U.S. presence in Colombia, Mexico, Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, and beyond; and

WHEREAS, the vast majority of U.S. aid comes in the form of military assistance rather than economic aid, and we can observe an increased level of global violence as well as economic and environmental devastation related to the drug trade; and

WHEREAS, according to a 1994 study by the Rand Corporation, coca and poppy crop eradication is the least effective method for controlling drug supply, while treatment and prevention have been shown to be twenty-three times more cost effective than source country eradication. Nonetheless, in 2003 forced aerial eradication of coca and poppy crops continues to be the major thrust of the U.S. drug policy in Colombia and throughout the Andes region, which only leads to greater levels of hunger, poverty, and environmental destruction.

THEREFORE LET IT BE RESOLVED, that the Twenty-fourth General Synod urges the federal government to:

1. Shift its emphasis from a law enforcement paradigm in favor a policy that treats drug use as a health problem with social and economic implications.
2. Eliminate racial disparities in U.S. drug laws, such as unequal sentencing for possession of crack cocaine and powder cocaine.
3. Improve the accessibility and affordability of drug treatment programs and related health services.
4. Reduce the use of incarceration for those involved in minor offenses, but instead offer medical treatment and/or alternatives to incarceration for first-time, non-violent offenders.
5. Invest in young people through increased funding for after-school programs, mentor programs, skills building, job training, and summer

employment programs.

6. Place renewed emphasis on economic aid rather than military assistance to other nations; and

LET IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Twenty-fourth General Synod urges the federal government to reevaluate international eradication efforts, which have not proven effective. The focus should instead be placed on economic development programs in other nations and decreasing the demand for drugs in the United States; and

LET IT BE FINALLY RESOLVED, that the Twenty-fourth General Synod calls on all settings of the church, through the leadership of Justice and Witness Ministries in cooperation with the other covenanted, affiliated and associated ministries, conferences, and associations, to:

1. Advocate for the elimination of racial bias in drug sentencing, such as disparate sentencing and mandatory minimums.
2. Advocate for alternatives to incarceration for first-time, nonviolent offenders.
3. Call for adequate funding for health care- based drug treatment programs in every community.
4. Support efforts in every community to treat drug abuse primarily as a public health problem rather than a law enforcement problem.
- 5 . Support economic development alternatives to the current U.S.-backed Plan Colombia, which primarily invests in militarized campaigns to eradicate coca plants in Colombia and the Andes region through aerial fumigation.

Funding for the implementation of this resolution will be made in accordance with the overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.