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## TECHNICAL PAPER

### **Cannabis: A Plant Without Borders. Cultural Diagnosis, One Hundred Years After Its Prohibition.**

Title of the technical paper

### **Cannabis Embassy — Legatio Cannabis — 大麻大使馆 — سفارة القنب**

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The Cannabis Embassy is responsible for the choice and presentation of the ideas and opinions expressed in this technical paper, which do not necessarily reflect the views of UNESCO and do not commit the Organization in any way.

## Name of organization(s) submitting the technical paper

|          | First Name | Last Name        | Position   | Organization   |
|----------|------------|------------------|--|--|
| Author 1 | Kenzi      | Riboulet-Zemouli | Head of Mission to Geneva  | Cannabis Embassy – Legatio Cannabis – 大麻大使馆 – سفارة القنب  |
| Author 2 | Lila       | Torre            | Researcher; Secretariat of the Cátedra Libre on Intangible Cultural Heritage | Universidad Nacional de La Plata (Argentina), Cátedra Libre on Intangible Cultural Heritage: Memories and Social Collectives |
| Author 3 | Farid      | Ghehiouèche      | International adviser  | NORML France   |
| Author 4 | Myrtle     | Clarke           | Managing Director; Secretariat   | Fields of Green for ALL NPC; South African Cannabis and Hemp Industry Development Association                                |

## Abstract

The centenary of the international prohibition of cannabis and its related cultural practices offers an opportunity to address a long-standing blind spot in global cultural policy. In 1961, the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs's Article 49 codified the eradication of traditional, non-medical uses of cannabis worldwide — disregarding their documented historical presence and silencing communities whose cultural expressions were never institutionally recognised nor safeguarded. Since 2003, the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage has shifted the normative framework. And socio-cultural groups associated with cannabis have managed to maintain their living cultural traditions, despite stigma and repression. This Technical Paper calls for a reconsideration of international obligations and commitments related to cannabis and cultural rights, including the right to maintain, transmit, and develop one's cultural heritage. It invites relevant institutions to foster enabling environments for the community-based safeguarding of cannabis-related living heritage, and to acknowledge the impact of stigma, criminalisation, and exclusion on the cultural vitality and intergenerational transmission of knowledge. Recognising cannabis cultures as part of the diversity of cultural expressions is essential to the promotion of inclusive, rights-based, and peace-oriented cultural policies in the 21st century.

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## Introduction

Cannabis is a plant with deeply-rooted historical, environmental, and cultural ties to all continents.<sup>1</sup> The Single Convention on narcotic drugs, 1961, created an unprecedented (and so far unmatched) legal obligation to “abolish” and “discontinue as soon as possible” its traditional uses and cultural practices globally.

The Single Convention’s Article 49 mandates the following for “the use of cannabis, cannabis resin, extracts and tinctures of cannabis for non-medical purposes; and the production and manufacture of and trade in” cannabis, when they were “traditional ... and ... permitted on 1 January 1961”:

“(f) The use of cannabis for other than medical and scientific purposes must be discontinued as soon as possible but in any case within twenty-five years from the coming into force of this Convention as provided in paragraph 1 of article 41;

“(g) The production and manufacture ... and trade ... for any of the uses mentioned therein must be reduced and finally abolished simultaneously with the reduction and abolition of such uses.”<sup>2</sup>

In another provision, Article 2(9), the Single Convention creates a set of legal regulations — not limited in time — applying to “drugs which are commonly used in industry for other than medical or scientific purposes”.<sup>3</sup>

The Convention bans traditional use of drugs for “other than medical or scientific purposes” that existed prior to 1961. However, it allows the “industry” from any point on to enjoy the same drugs for “other than medical or scientific purposes”.

The fundamental discrimination enshrined in this Article 49 is not only a gross violation of international human rights law. It is also a testament to the existence of traditional uses of “cannabis, cannabis resin, extracts and tinctures of cannabis” globally before 1961 — the proceedings of the 1961 diplomatic conference, and decades of discussion prior to that, are supporting information. More importantly, it is a benchmark to assess the evolution and vitality of the rich and diverse cultures associated with cannabis globally, and to design appropriate safeguarding strategies that take into account the complex nature of the threats to the cultural heritages associated with cannabis communities that can be entailed by such discriminative international legal provisions.

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<sup>1</sup> The uses of the *Cannabis sativa* L. plant are millennia-old and form part of diverse cultures across the globe. Since the Neolithic period in Eurasia and the Mediterranean, for millenia in Africa, and various centuries in America and the Pacific region, across territories and historical periods, social groups have recognised and valued the multiple properties and functions of this botanical species, originally native to Central Asia. Monospecific (“indica” and “sativa” or “hemp” and “marijuana” are the same plant), the fibres of *Cannabis* have been utilised for countless purposes; its cellulose for paper production; its fruits and seeds, roots, stems, leaves, and tops have been employed for food, medicinal, ritual, sacramental, social, and hedonistic purposes. More recently, the plant is being recognised for its potential in new applications: environmental phytoremediation, biofuel production, and bioconstruction. On diffusion patterns in Eurasia see Long et al., 2017; McPartland & Hegman, 2018; McPartland, Guy, & Hegman, 2018; in Africa and America see du Toit, 1976; Duvall, 2019b.

<sup>2</sup> See United Nations, 2013. See also Bruun, Pan, and Rexed, 1975.

<sup>3</sup> See United Nations, 1973; Riboulet-Zemouli, 2022.

Importantly, Article 49 should be understood within its historical context: in 1961, no institutional mechanism existed to document, protect, or safeguard living cultural traditions. It would take more than a decade before the international community adopted the 1972 World Heritage Convention, but it focused primarily on tangible elements. Only with the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage did States begin to formally structure the recognition and safeguarding of living traditions through binding, community-based frameworks. Today, these mechanisms balance the scope and challenge the legitimacy of Article 49.

## War on Drugs: A War on Cultures

The 1961 Convention replaced nine previous international drug control instruments (see Article 44: “Termination of previous international treaties”) among which was the International Opium Convention, signed at Geneva on 19 February 1925 — a century ago.

The 1925 International Opium Convention was the first international legal instrument to include measures related to *Cannabis* — a plant associated with many human cultures across continents, through rich and diverse socio-cultural and environmental interactions. The 1925 Opium Convention controlled the medicines derived from Cannabis, namely its extract and tincture. The monitoring of medication (termed “drug control” in the 1920s) was the core *raison d’être* of the International Opium Convention with respect to Cannabis. Legal provisions monitored international trade and included basic measures to respect the sovereignty of other countries’ trade dispositions regarding Cannabis medication.<sup>4</sup>

Between 1925 and 1961, something happened that turned the monitoring of cannabis medicines into an abolition “as soon as possible” of its traditional and non-medical uses. Controlling medicines has no links with suppressing other uses. Chilli pepper is used pharmaceutically; its resin is controlled under the Chemical Weapons Convention,<sup>5</sup> yet people are allowed to grow it on their balcony, culinary cultures around the plant have not been repressed, and the traditional knowledge holders of the plant have not been jailed and replaced by licit “industry” standards and licences. Traditional chilli pepper growers and modern industrial weapons manufacturing companies growing chilli pepper can coexist.

Cannabis could also. But not with the international legal provisions that have refrained it from happening since 1961.

Sixty-four years after the Single Convention, a century after the Opium Convention, neither cannabis nor its uses have been eradicated. To the contrary, its traditions and its socio-cultural heritage have not only survived prohibition, repression, and stigmatisation, but they managed to adapt, to reinvent themselves, to evolve, to revitalise.

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<sup>4</sup> Bruun, Pan, and Rexed, 1975; Collins, 2020; Kozma, 2011; Mills, 2007; Riboulet-Zemouli, 2025; Stensrud, 2022.

<sup>5</sup> See OPCW Scientific Advisory Board, 2017, p. 5; Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, 2020, p. 4; Timperley *et al.*, 2018

## Cultures of Resilience & Tolerance

International human rights instruments—including article 27(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), article 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and article 5(e)(vi) of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD)—affirm the right of all individuals, without discrimination, to equally take part in cultural life and to freely take part in the process of deciding which cultural practices to continue or not.

The Fribourg Declaration on Cultural Rights, in its Article 5(b) on access & participation in cultural life, affirms that the right to access and participate freely in cultural life includes:

“The freedom to exercise ... one’s own cultural practices and to follow a way of life associated with the promotion of one’s cultural resources ...”

But also:

“The right to the protection of the moral and material interests linked to the works that result from one’s cultural activity.”

These principles are reaffirmed in specific contexts by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in Article 5 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and in Article 26 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas.

For communities whose traditions involve cannabis, the fulfilment of these rights has frequently been obstructed by restrictive legal environments and enduring stigma.

Prohibition has reinforced stigma and social exclusion for individuals and communities associated with cannabis-related practices. Penal measures have rendered cultural artefacts and expressions legally suspect, and turned the representative objects and shared practices of entire groups into mere evidence of crimes. This has constrained the ability of individuals and communities to maintain, celebrate, or develop their heritage without fear of legal repercussion.<sup>6</sup>

Many cannabis-related traditions rely on oral transmission and lived experience. This is singularly the case for cannabis-related traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions of a number of Indigenous peoples and local communities working with cannabis. Criminalisation has displaced these traditions further underground, thereby at times interrupting the intergenerational transfer of knowledge.

There are also a number of examples of cannabis policy reforms in jurisdictions which did not contemplate local Indigenous knowledge systems, customary norms, and failed to be co-constructed with key affected populations, resulting in the further marginalisation of legacy cannabis communities and the replacement of legitimate cannabis cultures with commercially-driven alternatives. A significant threat associated is the mercantile exploitation of cannabis plant varieties and the agro-ecological and medical knowledge and cultures associated (biopiracy), both under prohibition and unfair regulatory models. The licit “industry” commercialisation of cannabis—particularly in wellness and pharmaceutical sectors—has often

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<sup>6</sup> See for example Martínez Oró, 2015; Clarke et al, 2021; Pardal, 2023.

drawn on the traditional medical or agronomic knowledge of cannabis farmers, or the genetic resources (seeds), without ethical access and equitable benefit-sharing (despite international legal agreements requiring it in some countries, such as the [Nagoya Protocol](#)).<sup>7</sup>

Paradoxically, prohibition also contributed to the living and evolving nature of cannabis cultures: at the same time constrained by repressive policies, cannabis-related cultural practices have also adapted and evolved to increase self-protection. Particularly salient examples include the rise of homegrowing, as well as the movement of small-scale, non-profit-oriented, and community-managed supply systems (like the “cannabis social clubs”).<sup>8</sup> Such evolutions of the supply patterns in cannabis communities have also resulted in notable socio-economic and health-related improvements for people who use cannabis: distancing from transnational organised criminal suppliers & reducing exposure to violence; sidelining intermediaries; and through a facilitated oversight of consumers over the plants grown, favouring organic methods of cultivation, analysis of harvested cannabis, and other harm reduction and quality improvement practices and know-hows.

In being pushed to the margins, cannabis cultures met “underground” cultures, which mutually-enriched. In fleeing repression in their countries, cannabis cultural practitioners met foreign cannabis communities, and mutually-enriched.<sup>9</sup>

## Recommendations

The centenary of the prohibition of cannabis-related uses and practices in 2025 represents a crucial opportunity: that of moving beyond decades marked by cultural degradation and sidelining, to initiate a new cycle based on the recognition of the practices and communities that steward this heritage, and that are engaged with the conservation of biodiversity, the promotion of rights and tolerance, and with peace.

As we meet with joint commitments to rethink and strengthen cultural policies as a “Culture for Peace” in ways that acknowledge historical injustices, reaffirm the dignity of all people and communities, and restore the legitimacy of marginalised traditions... let’s not forget *Cannabis* — hemp, mariguana, भांग–bhang, dagga, ganja, konopi, 麻–ma, pot, ntsangu, haschish, riamba, قنب–quinnab, siddhi, kif, cáñamo, mambe, 大麻–taima, chanvre, sedenegi.

### UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions:

“Article 2 – Guiding principles

3. Principle of equal dignity of and respect for all cultures

The protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions presuppose the recognition of equal dignity of and respect for all cultures, including the cultures of persons belonging to minorities and indigenous peoples.”

Efforts to document, characterise, revitalise, and safeguard the vulnerable cultural expressions of local communities connected to cannabis —within the framework of sustainable

<sup>7</sup> See Duvall, 2019a; .

<sup>8</sup> See Pardal, 2023; ENCOD, 2011.

<sup>9</sup> See Duff, 2013; ENCOD, 2020; Clarke et al., 2021.

development<sup>10</sup>— can play a constructive role in fostering global understanding and social cohesion. But in order to do so, it is essential to establish enabling environments at the regional level to initiate participatory safeguarding processes. These must strengthen the self-determination of communities without the distortions of stigma, discrimination, or criminalisation.

The following recommended action, stemming from the elements outlined in this Technical Paper, could be meaningful steps to take at or following the MONDIACULT 2025 Conference:

1. Acknowledge the policy crisis affecting the full enjoyment of the cultural rights of people part of cannabis-related communities, and putting at risk their cultural heritage.
2. Address the interactions between Article 49 of the Single Convention on narcotic drugs, 1961, and other international legal provisions, particularly in the UDHR, the two human rights covenants, and the ICERD.
3. Consider supporting existing or future community-led initiatives concerned with the identification, documentation, and safeguarding of cultural elements associated with cannabis and cannabis-related communities.

Cannabis cultures are a vibrant, resilient multiplicity of local —but interconnected— living heritage. But many of these cultures continue to be confronted with substantial threats, after a century of prohibition and stigma. By addressing this crisis, and promoting policies that foster a culture for peace rather than a war on drugs, our societies can play a substantial role in a more tolerant and sustainable future.

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<sup>10</sup> See Riboulet-Zemouli, 2021 for a set of specific cannabis policy recommendations aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 2016 UNGA Special Session on drug policy's political outcome document.



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## Annexes

### Annex 1: “2025 Centenary of Cannabis Prohibition – Global Cannabis History Year”

*The text below has been shared with the Commission on Narcotic Drugs of the United Nations at its 68th session, under agenda item 5(e) “Other matters arising from the international drug control treaties.” (document E/CN.7/2025/NGO/13) by Fields of Green for ALL, NPC, a non-governmental organisation in consultative status with the ECOSOC, on behalf of the Cannabis Embassy—Legatio Cannabis—大麻大使馆—سفارة القنب.*

#### I. CANNABIS or HEMP or MARIJUANA or OTHER

If the history of *Cannabis* and humankind was a clock, prohibition would only be its last 2 minutes. From time immemorial *Cannabis* has grown, been grown, and used for countless purposes. Worldwide, *Cannabis* provided clothing, food, feed and bedding for livestock, medicine, and a spiritual and social enhancer. But things changed brutally, only a hundred years ago.

The modern prohibition of *Cannabis sativa* L. plant (also known as hemp, marihuana, भांग, dagga, конопля, ganja, 麻, pot, ntsangu, haschisch, canapa, riamba, قنب, siddhi, kif, cáñamo, bangui, 大麻, chanvre, konopí...) originated before 1925 in Brazil, Egypt, and South Africa. The USA came much, much later.

But it was only in **1925** that *Cannabis* acquired a marked world character that continues to this day, as it entered international law for the first time.

#### II. 1925: TWO TREATIES

In 1925, the Geneva Opium Convention included “Indian hemp,” upon request from Egypt.<sup>[1]</sup> For the first time, *Cannabis* had become an internationally-controlled drug. The conservative Brazilian, Egyptian, and South African governments had managed to extend to the entire planet their racist, colonially-biased, and intolerant views of an ancestral plant.<sup>[2]</sup>

In 1925 also, the Brussels Pharmacopoeia Treaty included for the first time *Cannabis* (herb, extract, tincture) in the International Pharmacopoeia, alongside other important medicines.<sup>[3]</sup>

The 1925 Opium Convention generated a descendance of treaties that **continue to be in force** worldwide today (like the **Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961**).

On the other hand, the presence of *Cannabis* in the International Pharmacopoeia did not last long: all medicinal plants (including *Cannabis*) were deleted from it, just after the second World War (WWII), leaving only active compounds.<sup>[4]</sup>

#### III. 1935: BIASED ASSESSMENT

In 1935, *Cannabis* was subject to an international scientific review. It was found harmless, and its use in medicine was, at the time, quite widespread.<sup>[5]</sup> But the scientists’ outcome was misutilised by political processes, and after WWII, misinformation about the review was used to reinforce anti-*Cannabis* sentiments. The world had to wait until 2018, when a new and unbiased international scientific review took place.<sup>[6]</sup>

#### IV. 1939–1945

World War I had represented the consolidation of international drug control, as victory treaties included clauses which made more countries join the early drug control Conventions. It prepared the ground for the 1925 Opium Convention to happen.<sup>[7]</sup> On the contrary, WWII represented a curious temporary bubble of *Cannabis* enthusiasm from all parts.

Driven by the need for its fibres in the ramped-up industrial production for the war effort, all sides (including **UK, USA, Japan, Germany**) encouraged *Cannabis* cultivation to ramp up military production and supplies in various applications such as ropes, canvas, textiles...<sup>[8]</sup>

**Mexico** only joined WWII in 1942... but before that, the country experimented in 1940 the legalisation of marihuana and all other drugs. Although the USA pressured Mexico to revert its law within months, it remains a pioneering public health approach, still inspirational today.<sup>[9]</sup>

## V. The COLD WAR... on DRUGS

Starting in 1937, the **USA** had begun a crusade against the plant within its border. It was paused during the war, but restarted right after. This led to the criminalisation of users and a significant decline in the production of *Cannabis* for industrial purposes —benefiting other industries. Since the USA had signed neither the Opium nor the Pharmacopoea Treaties, however, they still kept their *Cannabis* affairs internal at that time. While repression was ramping up, it was still far from the aggressive chase of smokers and patients that came after the 1970s.

**China** and **Russia**, on their side, never banned the production of *Cannabis*... at least for industrial purposes. However, during the Cold War, the countries were no different from the USA in their repression of uses of psychoactive parts.

The post-war period was synonymous with ramping up prohibition in many countries, although there was not yet a global coordinated effort to eradicate *Cannabis* and its cultures.

## VI. The TAKEOVER of SEEDS

In the post-war era, the world also witnessed the appearance of novel plant varieties of *Cannabis* —mostly in Europe— tailored specifically to have the least possible amount of THC, amidst a rapid transition from traditional to industrialised agriculture. **France** and **Italy** brute-forced the adoption of the UPOV treaty,<sup>[11]</sup> creating a form of patents on plant varieties, which favoured these novel proprietary (and low-THC) hemp varieties, over traditional hemp landraces with varying amounts of THC (but never anywhere close to zero).

In the 18th century, without evidence to back it up, some European botanists had the novel idea to classify hemp into two distinct classes: the “good” sativa from **Europe**, and the “drug-type” indica from **the Indies**.<sup>[12]</sup> With UPOV, questionable breeders and politicians succeeded in altering the unicity of *Cannabis* in the field, centuries after altering it in the mind of (European and Western) scientists and societies.

## VII. A CENTURY of PAIN...

The 1925 Opium Convention was not a prohibition treaty. It was a treaty controlling drugs.<sup>[13]</sup>

However, this control enabled authoritarian governments to apply exceptional measures to *Cannabis*, like bans. Which they happily did (although not all). The 1961 Convention is exactly the same: it does not impose prohibition, it just suggests it to governments... which then go on gladly to implement it.

The more recent part of global prohibition is better known: in the 1970s, US president Richard Nixon recovered from its initiators —Egypt, South Africa and Brazil<sup>[1]</sup>— the reins of the anti-drugs fight, scaling it to unprecedented levels of destruction which continue to fuel massive environmental damage and human rights violations to this day.

Prohibition is global, and at the same time extremely local. *Cannabis* peoples and communities as well! **In a hundred years, they didn't succeed in eradicating us. In a hundred years, they didn't succeed in replacing our traditional *Cannabis* plant varieties with their proprietary strains.**

## VIII. ...vs MILLENIA of HEALING

*“Quisieron enterrarnos pero no sabían que éramos semillas”*

– They wanted to bury us, not knowing that we were seeds.

The Cannabis Embassy has been proclaimed as an independent state without territory,<sup>[14]</sup> to be the government that can protect, promote, and uphold your rights, the rights of *Cannabis* peoples worldwide, negated so far by their “classic” government. The Cannabis Embassy aims to alleviate this. Starting with the necessary exercise of commemoration, memory and remembrance for 100

years of death and devastation, but also celebration and upholding of the hundreds of years before 1925, when *Cannabis* and humans enjoyed positive, mutually-beneficial relationships. In 2025, rather than marking a century of prohibition, we will honour a millennium of recorded *Cannabis*-human history. We will reflect on the positive contributions and aspects of societies and nature that our diverse Cannabis communities have safeguarded, nurtured, developed, and created throughout this period.<sup>[15]</sup>

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## NOTES and BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. On this important role of Egypt in early global *Cannabis* control, two articles by Liat Kozma are must-reads: “Cannabis Prohibition in Egypt, 1880–1939: From Local Ban to League of Nations Diplomacy” *Middle Eastern Studies*, 2011: 47(3), 443–460; and “The League of Nations and the debate over cannabis prohibition” *History Compass*, 2011: 9(1), 61–70. It is also important to read Chris S. Duvall’s *The African Roots of Marijuana*, Duke University Press, 2019. And perhaps the most self-explanatorily titled book chapter by Scheerer, Sebastian (1997) “North-American Bias and non American roots of cannabis prohibition” In: Böllinger, L. (Ed.), *Cannabis Science: From Prohibition to Human Right*, Peter Lang.
2. Anna Stensrud. *The Racist Roots of International Cannabis Regulation: An analysis of the Second Geneva Opium Conference*. Thesis, University of Oslo, 2022.
3. Officially: “Brussels Agreement on the Unification of Pharmacopoeial Formulas for Potent Medications”. The WHO described in 2008 the history of the International Pharmacopoeia and the critical role of the 1925 Treaty in that process. See also notes 5 & 6 below.
4. Source: *Unification of Pharmacopoeias Committee. Sessions: 1st Session, Geneva, October 1947* (Located at: Archives WHO1, World Health Organisation Archives, Geneva, Switzerland; Docket 758.4.1.). On the history of the international pharmacopoeia and cannabis, the best reference remains Jean Volckringer (1953) *Évolution et Unification des Formulaires et des Pharmacopées*, Paul Brandouy Paris. Because THC (synonym with dronabinol) was unknown at the time, THC did not make it into the post-WWII international pharmacopoeia.
5. Kenzi Riboulet-Zemouli, Farid Ghehiouèche, & Michael A. Krawitz (2022) “Cannabis amnesia – Indian hemp parley at the Office International d’Hygiène Publique in 1935” *Authorea preprints*.
6. Kenzi Riboulet-Zemouli & Michael A. Krawitz (2022) “WHO’s First Scientific Review of Medicinal Cannabis: From Global Struggle to Patient Implications” *Drugs Habits and Social Policy* 23(1): 5–21.
7. William B. McAllister (2000), *Drug Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century*, Routledge. See also notes 1, 2, 5, and: Kettil Bruun, Lynn Pan, & Ingemar Rexed (1975), *The Gentlemen’s Club: International control of drugs and alcohol*, University of Chicago Press.
8. During WWII, all countries parties to the conflict ramped-up their production of durable and utility materials for use in military gear like ropes, parachutes, and uniforms, which included high-yield natural fibre crops, including *Cannabis*. The example of the USA is perhaps better documented and known, with the emblematic short movie “Hemp for Victory” screened at the time in the country. Vice news published a post discussing “Hemp Against Hitler: How Cannabis Helped America Win World War II”
9. In 1940, Mexican President Lázaro Cárdenas implemented a pioneering drug policy (incubated by the psychiatrist Leopoldo Salazar Viniegra) fully decriminalising *Cannabis* and other drugs, allowing small-scale sales and use, while establishing clinics to provide controlled, low-cost drugs for people with drug use disorders. The law was repealed after five months due to resource shortages and intense pressure from the USA. On this episode see: Benjamin T. Smith, (2019) “The Dialectics of Dope: Leopoldo Salazar Viniegra, the Myth of Marijuana, and Mexico’s State Drug Monopoly”, In: S. Wilson (Ed.), *Prohibitions and Psychoactive Substances in History, Culture and Theory*, Routledge; Isaac Campos (2017) “A Diplomatic Failure: The Mexican Role in the Demise of the 1940 Reglamento Federal de Toxicomanías”, *Third World Quarterly* 39(3). Sonoro’s podcast *Toxicomanía*:



*the Mexican Experiment* portrays this period, providing an insightful overview of the Mexican legalisation and its context.

10. Chris Otto (2019) "[Lamenting what we'll never know about Phyllis J. Stalnaker Harris.](#)" *Papergreat* [online].
11. On UPOV, see: [Association for Plant Breeding for the Benefit of Society](#) [online]
12. David A. Guba (2020) *Taming Cannabis: Drugs and Empire in Nineteenth-Century France*. McGill-Queen's University Press.
13. See *Drug Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century* (note 7 above) and: John Collins (2020) "[A Brief History of Cannabis and the Drug Conventions](#)" *AJIL Unbound* 114: 279–284.
14. Cannabis Embassy (2024), "[Proclamation of the Cannabis Embassy, 17 March 2024.](#)" [online]
15. Cannabis Embassy (2024), "[2025 Centenary of Cannabis Prohibition – Global Cannabis History Year.](#)" [online].

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Find the original text, without the sections redacted prior to submission to the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, at

[cannabisembassy.org/news/2024/10/background-2025-centenary-of-cannabis-prohibition](https://cannabisembassy.org/news/2024/10/background-2025-centenary-of-cannabis-prohibition)

More information about the 2025 Centenary of Cannabis Prohibition: [2025.cannabisembassy.org](https://2025.cannabisembassy.org)

## Annex 2: “Cannabis: A Century of Being Silenced — Voices for the Next Hundred Years”

In 2025, the world reaches an unusual milestone: the **Centenary of International Cannabis Prohibition**. One hundred years since the 1925 Geneva Opium Convention first drew *Cannabis* into the expanding machinery of global drug control—an act driven not by science or public health, but by geopolitics, colonial control, and cultural erasure. One hundred years, also, since the 1925 Brussels International Pharmacopoeia Agreement recognised *Cannabis* herb, extract, and tincture, as medications worthy of cross-nation harmonisation.

These two Centenary treaties marked a dual path: one of criminalisation and one of standardisation—both imposed, neither inclusive. **These were not treaties of consent, but instruments of control**, drafted in rooms from which most of the world, particularly colonised peoples and Indigenous nations—but also rural farmers, urban and periurban communities worldwide—were systematically excluded.

The history that followed was not linear, but systemic. In 1961, the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs reinforced and expanded the 1925 logic, placing *Cannabis* in Schedule IV—a designation that functioned less as a regulatory measure than as a **symbolical banishment** (nowadays, thanks to citizen efforts of the proto-Cannabis Embassy, the plant has been withdrawn from Schedule IV). Even as cultures and communities continued to live with the plant in respectful symbiosis, the international community doubled down on a punitive model, silencing millennia of practice and knowledge.

Yet, long before 1925, *Cannabis* was already a **companion species to humankind**. Across continents, languages, cultural and spiritual traditions, it was food, fibre, medicine, sacrament, culture, and leisure. From the bhang of India to the dagga of southern Africa, the ma of China to the cáñamo of the Pyrenees, and from the Mediterranean kif to the konopí of central Europe or to the marihuana of the Americas, *Cannabis* was a tool of survival and a vehicle of meaning. Farmers, healers, herbalists and doctors, artists, and spiritual leaders—many of them women—passed on their knowledge orally, generation after generation. The relationship was never just botanical; it was ecological, social, and profoundly cultural. For most of our history, *Cannabis* was not the object of law—it was the subject of life.

**The rupture came with prohibition.** For a hundred years, a global regime criminalised plants and prosecuted people. **It converted ancestral wisdom into contraband and custodians into criminals.** The damage has been universal: no state, no people, no land has been spared the stigma, violence, and erasure inflicted in the name of a “drug-free” world —when psychoactive plants and fungi are consubstantial to humanity. Even as legalisation spreads, the ghosts of prohibition still haunt those who carried *Cannabis* traditions in their hands and hearts. Worse still, legal reforms have too often reproduced the injustices they were meant to undo, excluding precisely those most harmed by the prohibitionist past.

It is in this context that the “**5R Centenary: 2025–2125**” emerges —not just as a commemoration of a hundred years of misguided policy, but as a roadmap for a future shaped by the ***Re-legalisation & Regulation*** of *Cannabis*, as well as ***Respect, Remedy*** and ***Reparations*** for its people. At its core lies a shift in narrative: from the repression to safeguarding. From silencing *Cannabis* cultures to recognising them as intangible cultural heritage worthy of protection, conservation, and safeguarding. From exclusion to the co-creation of new regulation paradigms.

Such recognition is not symbolic. It can provide legal and political armour against human rights violation, repression, stigma, marginalisation, but also against biopiracy and the ongoing expropriation of plant knowledge. It can be a bridge between past and future, between *Cannabis* communities and the broader public, and between States and the peoples they have criminalised for so long.

The centenary of *Cannabis* prohibition is no celebration. It is a grave reminder of what happens when international law strays from justice and empathy. But it also offers a rare moment for reckoning —and opening new pathways of tolerance and mutual understanding.

The next hundred years must be different. They must begin not with silence, but with listening. Not with regulation for profit, but with reparation for the pain inflicted. And not with more control, but with the full and free flourishing of *Cannabis* cultures and their peoples.

**Welcome to the 5R Centenary.** Let us legalise wisely, regulate justly, remedy urgently, and repair fairly.