
Van: Job Joris Arnold - Cannabis College [mailto:job@cannabiscollege.com]

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Aan: 'editor@thestar.com.my'

Onderwerp: To the Editor of The Star: 25yr-old gets death for trafficking ganja

(P.S. In case you decide to publish this letter, please be so kind as to inform us about the date of publication. Thank you for your consideration.)

Dear Sir,

Khalil Anuar Sukirman has been sentenced to death for trafficking over one kilo of cannabis three years ago (Malaysian Star, September 4 2009). According to Amnesty International, sixteen countries in Asia still apply the death penalty for drug-related offences. Harsh penalties are thought to deter drug crimes as well as consumption. But do they? Harsh penalties drive up the prices of illicit drugs, raising the risk premium for traffickers and thus making smuggling even more attractive. And for a closer look at the effect of a repressive policy on consumption, let's consider the case of The Netherlands where for more than thirty years now, distribution of cannabis through specialized coffee shops has secured safe access to a reliable product for every adult citizen.

Believe it or not, cannabis consumption rates in The Netherlands are no higher than those of neighboring countries with far stiffer cannabis policies. Rates in the UK are easily twice as high, and in the US where draconian sentences are often handed out, rates are up to four times higher than in The Netherlands. Apparently, the official policy has little effect on the behavior of citizens.

The death penalty is a violation of fundamental rights, the right to life and the right not to be subjected to cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment, important parts of the UN-adopted Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Cannabis is considered a soft drug in my country because of the negligible health risk its consumption poses to both the individual and the public at large. In all its history there hasn't been a single report of death from overdose, whereas many people take it on doctor's prescription to treat a large variety of ailments, among them MS, glaucoma, depression and the side effects of chemotherapy. Killing Khalil Anuar Sukirman for trafficking a relative benign substance does not serve justice, only the misguided objectives of a failed governmental policy.

Yours,

Job Joris Arnold

Spokesman

Cannabis College

OZ Achterburgwal 124

1012 DT Amsterdam

THE NETHERLANDS

job@CannabisCollege.com

T 06 52 05 23 06

www.cannabiscollege.com



Cannabis College is an Amsterdam based freely accessible info center. Our goal is public enlightenment

through objective information about the cannabis plant and her countless possible uses. Since its founding in 1998, Cannabis College has been a tourist magnet in the city center. Visitors of the permanent exhibition are welcome to see cannabis plants growing and flowering in our indoor garden.

- One acre of hemp produces four times more paper than one acre of tree forest.