

"Prohibition: violations of human rights are the result".

In the Philippines, a "war on drugs" rages, US President Trump wants capital punishment for dealers. Conversation with Michael Kleim*

*Interview: Kristian Stemmler***

In mid-March, in a speech in New-Hampshire reacting to the US opioid epidemic, US President Donald Trump praised his Filipino counterpart Rodrigo Duterte, who had thousands of drug dealers killed, and even endorsed the death penalty for dealers in the US. What do you think about this?

Since President Duterte took power in the Philippines, the drug war has escalated there. The number of extrajudicial executions has skyrocketed. Most affected are inhabitants of the slums. Lawmakers, journalists, human rights activists, socially and ecclesiastically committed people or people who were simply "only" in the wrong place are also targeted by the state's killers. This makes it obvious that systematic human rights violations and a destabilization of democracy are essential and inevitable consequences of prohibition. Donald Trump's remarks show that he wants to use prohibition to further reduce the open, liberal society in the United States.



Against Repressive Drug Policy: Demonstration against Trump's "Fighting the Opioid Crisis" (Manchester, New Hampshire, March 19) Photograph: Jonathan Ernst/REUTERS

New Hampshire is heavily affected by opioid addiction. There, many have slipped into the heroin addiction via the lax prescription of painkillers such as oxycodone. You belong to the [Schildower Kreis](#)*, which regards prohibition, i.e. the prohibition of drugs, as the actual problem. How should society deal with**

drugs?

Drug use should be perceived as a reality of human culture and taken seriously. Further, we should strive to understand dysfunctional behavior and addictive relationships by their causes. Only then can we adequately react. Social structures that promote destructive drug use must also be exposed. The prohibition policy actually leads to the blocking of an examination of the causes of dependency.

What other consequences does Prohibition have?

On the one hand, Prohibition artificially increases the real risks for drug users and creates new dangers. On the other hand, key objectives of the prohibition policy, such as health care, protection of minors and the fight against crime, are completely missed. They could be better achieved through state drug regulation. And as described above, prohibition inevitably leads to democracy reduction and human rights violations.

In the US, we would have to learn from history. Alcohol Prohibition in the 1920s was the midwife of the American mafia

Prohibition makes rational reasoning difficult because there is an ideology behind it. Man-made fears play an essential role, as do clearly defined enemy images and a rigorous, arrogant moralism. It is no coincidence that the drug war is an arsenal of religious and political fundamentalists. Even the authoritarian left has promoted Prohibition significantly. In the US, there is an excessive amount of racism and social Darwinism hidden in the prohibition policy.

How could legal access to today's illegalized drugs be achieved?

The economically strong black market operates without any control and at high speed. Its influence must be replaced by a system of regulated drug distribution. Depending on the substance and target group, models for this include an expansion of the medical approach, the establishment of non-profit structures such as the social club model or the sale in specialty stores. Factors such as consumer and youth protection, professional support and a clear boundary from criminal structures are essential.

* Michael Kleim is a Protestant theologian and works in Gera as a pastor. He is active in the Schildower Kreis*, which is against prohibition

**Translated from German by the DPI

***The German Schildower Kreis (Schildower Circle) is an expert network for the legalization of drugs. Speaker of the Schildower Kreis is Lorenz Böllinger, Professor emeritus of criminal law and criminology, University of Bremen.