

# *Mexico Kicks Off Historic Debate on Marijuana Legalization*

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Cancun, January 27 (RHC-teleSUR) -- Mexico launched its first national forum on the question of marijuana legalization Tuesday in the Caribbean city of Cancun, the first of five historic debates that could change the future of marijuana prohibition in the country.

“This is an issue that has directly or indirectly affected the lives of millions of Mexicans,” Interior Minister Miguel Angel Osorio Chong said at the forum, which was broadcast on-line in the name of broadening participation. “Such a delicate issue cannot be left to improvisation.”

The event touched on issues of public health and potential addiction with recreational marijuana use. The other four debates will tackle other themes related to personal consumption.

The series of debates comes after Mexico’s Supreme Court ruled in November that recreational use of marijuana is a constitutional right, a historic decision that raised expectations of impending legalization.

The ruling related to a particular case of marijuana cultivation for recreational use brought before the court, and did not change Mexico’s drug laws. President Enrique Peña Nieto, who opposes legalization but has been open to debate on the topic, was quick to clarify that the country’s marijuana laws remain in place despite the ruling.

The debate also comes as Senator Cristina Diaz, from Peña Nieto's Institutional Revolutionary Party, introduced a bill proposing legalization of medicinal marijuana and days after Mexican Congress President Jesus Zambrano spoke out in favor of marijuana legalization for medicinal and recreational use as a tactic to cut down on organized crime.

Advocates of marijuana legalization argue that decriminalization is a better approach than the militarized “war on drugs” to reduce violence by taking power away from cartels.

The discussion comes as part of a larger movement across the region toward legalizing marijuana.

In Colombia, another country long plagued by drug violence and a ground zero for the war on drugs, cultivation and sale of marijuana for medical purposes was legalized last month

Puerto Rico legalized medicinal marijuana last May, Chile harvested its first crop of medicinal marijuana last April, and Jamaica legalized small-scale pot possession and cultivation for personal use at the beginning of 2015.

Legal recreational cannabis use and sale in Uruguay, where growing up to six pot plants for personal use was legalized in 2014, has made the country a global leader in progressive drug policy.

In the United States, 23 states have legalized medicinal marijuana and four states and the capital district have legalized recreational use.

Mexico decriminalized the possession of small amounts of recreational drugs in 2009.

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