

Increase in drug use: Cuba launches prevention campaign



Event as part of the drug prevention campaign (source: [Imarrero/X](#))

In the context of the ongoing economic crisis, drug abuse has become a growing problem in socialist Cuba. According to the Cuban authorities, 1,157 people were convicted of drug trafficking last year and more than a ton of substances such as cocaine, methamphetamine, and cannabinoids were seized.

The authorities are particularly concerned about the increasing spread of a synthetic cannabinoid known on the island simply as “El Químico” (The Chemical). The composition of this “marijuana substitute” is not uniform, but is typically based on animal anesthetics, epilepsy drugs, and formaldehyde. The substance can be up to a hundred times stronger than natural cannabis and is also significantly cheaper, making it attractive to young people.

As Elizabeth Céspedes Lantigua, head of the Center for Addiction Treatment in Adolescents, explained, consumption can lead to seizures and loss of muscle control. Frequent use can cause mental illness and irreversible organ damage, particularly to the heart, liver, and kidneys.

In response, the authorities launched the third nationwide “Exercise to Prevent and Combat Drug Offenses” on March 16. The campaign aims to inform the population about the risks of drug use and raise awareness of the issue, according to the party newspaper *Granma*. The events are being organized by the local Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (*Comités de Defensa de la Revolución*, CDR). Prevention events are being held in schools, and families are to be more closely involved in protecting their children.

However, administrative measures have also been tightened: controls are being stepped up on roads, in ports and at airports, and the storage of medicines and chemicals is being checked. State television reported on “exemplary trials” against alleged drug traffickers in Havana.

Government officials emphasize that most drugs enter the country from abroad. They are either smuggled in by sea or in the luggage of travelers. The latter are often unsuspecting couriers who transport luggage on behalf of agencies without knowing its contents.

Critics see the causes of the growing drug problem not only in external factors, but also in the severe economic crisis. "Many people, especially young people, see no way out and turn to drugs," says a resident of Havana. Strong psychotropic drugs prescribed by the state health system are also often misused.

Like Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, China, Russia, and Singapore, Cuba is one of the countries that pursues a "zero tolerance" policy toward illegal drugs. The penalties for trafficking and possession of prohibited substances are relatively high, and there are no exemption limits for consumers. ([Cubaheute](#))