

The Bioethics Society of the English-Speaking Caribbean (BSEC) in collaboration with the University of the West Indies (UWI), St. Augustine hosted a Forum entitled – “*Cannabis – Angel or Demon?*” on Sunday, Nov 18th 2018, at Amphitheatre B, Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, Mount Hope, Trinidad

Chaired by Professor Seetharaman, President of the BSEC, the forum started at 9:15 AM. The welcome address by Dr Grace Sirju-Charran, Vice-President, BSEC, highlighted the purposes and importance of this forum as well as some of the questions it seeks to answer.

Dr Sandra Reid, Ag. Dean of FMS, UWI presented the opening remarks, congratulating BSEC for the organization of this event. She emphasized that education, debate, sharing views and a multidisciplinary approach to the decriminalization and or legalization of Cannabis was paramount in T&T. As a psychiatrist, she also cautioned regarding the psychotropic effects of Cannabis and advised a stepwise approach in decriminalization.

The socioeconomic impact of Cannabis was presented by Mr David Abdulah, economist and politician Prof Jayaraj Jayaraman, biotechnologist, highlighted the scientific aspects of Cannabis and what science and UWI can do to explore the capabilities of the plant in various fields.

The legal aspects including the current status of the CARICOM Committee on decriminalization of Cannabis was presented by Prof Rose Marie Antoine, Dean of Faculty of Law, UWI, St. Augustine.

Prof Yuri Clement explained the pharmacological aspects, Dr Anthony Pottinger spoke about the medicinal uses including the endocannabinoid system, Mr Kelvin Nakhid spoke about the religious implications of Cannabis use and finally Prof Hariharan highlighted the ethical implications of Cannabis use including the ethics of recreational use.

Each speaker shared their personal experiences and educational knowledge from a wide range of perspectives. An interactive Panel discussion at the end of the Forum, paved way for the audience to raise questions to the speakers and enhanced the knowledge.

Two major take away points from the Forum include:

- More public consultations are needed to address this topic from a social perspective and to ensure that the interest of the local stakeholders are prioritized.
- A small step of decriminalization may facilitate permission for the use of Cannabis for scientific research, because this is the only way to make informed decisions regarding its use. This will not only protect the local species of the plant, but also opens up a huge area of application of Cannabis in medicine. If this originates from the Caribbean, it will form a source of potential economic resource development which will include intellectual property rights.

The Forum ended at 1:40 pm with a 15-minute intermission around 11:00 pm.