



SLUM CHILD FOUNDATION

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The Hon. Barrack Hussein Obama
President, United States of America

Dear President Obama,

My name is George Ochieng Odalo, and I write you as a representative of Slum Child Foundation (SCF), a Kenyan nonprofit organization working with children and youth in the slums and streets of Nairobi.

The children I work with are among your greatest admirers – which is why your recent remarks about marijuana and your relative silence about the drug's growing legalization in the United States are deeply troubling. I realize you face many political dynamics I do not understand. However, I do know this serious issue should not be a political one. It should be about health first. This is also not an issue for one or two of your states to decide. Marijuana legalization in just a portion of your country has a negative impact on my country, too.

I already see how the talk about marijuana in the U.S. has hurt my work in the slums, where illicit drug use – including marijuana use – is the one of the biggest problems affecting the children I try to steer away from high school dropout, teenage pregnancy, criminality and risky behaviors that often result in HIV/AIDS. These children do not have strong parental supervision. They do not have fathers like you, who insisted to *The New Yorker* you would tell your own daughters not to use marijuana.

Mr. President, I urge you to reconsider your words and lack of action and clarity. Marijuana legalization is not necessary to reform problematic laws in your country or around the world. Legalization is not necessary to give people better addiction treatment. It is greedy, not innovative or admirable, for industry to sell this addictive drug – which is many times more potent than the marijuana you admit using during your youth -- with untruthful ads, false claims, colorful packaging and foods that are popular with children.

Please consider the poor and vulnerable children in your country and mine – the land of your father -- and around the world. They cannot afford access to treatment, and they already have so many things going against them in life. We should stand up to adults who fail to consider the needs of children, especially poor children, in their own selfish pursuits of intoxication.

Sincerely,

George Ochieng Odalo
Executive Director
Slum Child Foundation