



Home Office

Direct Communications Unit

2 Marsham Street, London SW1P 4DF

Switchboard 020 7035 4848 Fax: 020 7035 4745 Textphone: 020 7035 4742

E-mail: public.enquiries@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk Website: www.homeoffice.gov.uk

peter@azizshamanism.com

Mr Peter Aziz

Reference: T9262/7

Date: 23 March 2007

Dear Mr Aziz,

Thank you for your e-mail of 28 February regarding ayahuasca. Your e-mail has been passed to the Drug Strategy Unit and I have been asked to reply.

Ayahuasca, as it is called in Ecuador or Peru or Yage or Yaje as it is called in Columbia is the Amazonian name for the jungle vine *Banisteriopsis Caapi*. The B Caapi vine is a Malpighiaceae jungle liana found in tropical regions of Peru, Bolivia, Panama, Brazil, the Orinico of Venezuela and the Pacific Coast of Columbia and Ecuador. The vine is the common base ingredient of the Ayahuasca tea and contains among other compounds, the active bio-chemicals harmine, harmic acid, harmaline, tetrahydroharmine and harmalic acid.

When added to other admixture plants that contain DMT (N.N. Dimethyltryptamine) particularly *Psychotria viridis*, it becomes a powerful psychedelic, allowing access to a mythological and visionary world that provided healing and revelation. The harmaline in the B Caapi prevents the breakdown of the DMT and allows it to enter the bloodstream when drunk. Harmaline also extends DMT's visionary effects by up to six hours. As a result, the term Ayahuasca is often loosely used to refer to any combination of MAOI (Monamine Oxidase Inhibitor) with DMT.

As you point out, DMT is illegal in the UK being a Class A, Schedule 1 Controlled Drug under the Misuse of Drugs legislation. The B Caapi plant **on its own** does not contain DMT, but when it is added to admixture plants which

contain DMT the legal situation becomes slightly confusing. A plant in its natural state which contained a controlled compound would not necessarily be considered to be illegal. However, if the plant has been "prepared" for example if the leaves have been deliberately dried or if seeds are powdered, it is likely that they would be considered to be unlawful. In addition, putting a substance into a form ready and intended to be used as a drug could be deemed as a product and as such would also be considered to be unlawful.

So if a plant contains a controlled drug and the courts agree that the material is a preparation or product then it is controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act. However, I cannot say with any degree of certainty whether or not anyone would be prosecuted for possessing a plant containing DMT which is in its natural state, as there is a great deal of uncertainty around the issue and ultimately it would be for the courts to decide.

Yours sincerely,

Chris Edwards