



U.S. Department of Justice
Drug Enforcement Administration

Washington, D.C. 20537

APR 22 1986

Mr. Carl Eric Olsen
01955-036
Federal Correctional Institution
Unit B - South
PMB 1000
Tallahassee, Florida 32301

Dear Mr. Olsen:

This is in response to your petitions for issuance of a regulation, or for amendment of a regulation, to exempt from the general prohibitions and requirements of the Controlled Substances Act "the non-drug use of marijuana in bona fide religious ceremonies of the Ethiopian Zion Coptic Church."

In enacting the Controlled Substances Act, 21 U.S.C. 801, et seq., Congress found that marijuana was a substance having a high potential for abuse without a countervailing accepted medical use or accepted safety for use under medical supervision. Accordingly, Congress placed marijuana in Schedule I of the Controlled Substances Act, the most restrictive of the Act's five schedules. In 1984, an estimated 7,800 to 9,200 metric tons of marijuana were illegally consumed in the United States. It has been estimated that over 20 million people in the United States use marijuana on a regular basis. Marijuana abuse is a major public health problem in this country. Accordingly, the investigation and prosecution of marijuana traffickers, the interdiction of marijuana smuggling and the eradication of the drug at its source continue to be major concerns of drug law enforcement both domestically and internationally.

In view of the immensity of the marijuana abuse problem in the United States and the magnitude of the criminal activity surrounding the production and trafficking in this substance, the Administrator of the Drug Enforcement Administration concludes that the interest of the Ethiopian Zion Coptic Church in the ceremonial use of marijuana is outweighed by the compelling governmental interest in controlling the use and illegal distribution of marijuana in the United States. Accordingly, your petitions for exemption of such use by members of the Ethiopian Zion Coptic Church must be, and they hereby are, denied.

Yours very truly,


John C. Lawn
Administrator