

Drug trafficking in Colombia

This month's newsletter focuses on drug trafficking in Colombia and is part of ongoing work for a dossier on this topic. The dossier will include analysis on interconnections between the illicit drug industry and internal conflict, as well as influences of the industry on politics, economy, society, environment and Colombia's relations with other countries.

In December 2006, the Colombian government launched a counterinsurgency strategy, "Plan Victoria," which continues the work of "Plan Patriota" and "Plan Colombia" on drug trafficking issues. The government also announced a new phase of Plan Colombia, which aims at consolidating the accomplishments of the 2000-2006 phase. Along with these announcements, Colombia also resumed aerial spraying of coca crops at the Ecuadorian border, although fumigation had been suspended a year earlier due to Ecuador's request for a ban on spraying within 10 kilometers of its border.

The profitable Colombian cocaine trade evolved during the late 1970s and early 1980s, when manufacturers imported coca base from Bolivia and Peru and processed it into cocaine destined for the US and Europe. The flourishing drug trafficking business led to the development of so-called cartels in Medellín and Cali. The boom of coca cultivation in Colombia only began in the late 1980s and reached its peak in the last half of the 1990s.

Since then, the Colombian government, with heavy military support from the US within the framework of Plan Colombia, as well as financial support from the EU and the Illicit Crop Monitoring Programme of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime has adopted an anti-narcotics and anti-narcotrafficking strategy. This strategy includes the above-mentioned aerial spraying, manual crop eradication, alternative development, control of chemical substances, destruction of clandestine laboratories, persecution of money laundering, and air and sea interdiction.

Since the 1970s, the most heavily used tool in the war on drugs has been aerial fumigation. From the mid 1990s, its use has been intensified. According to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, this strategy has led to a decrease in the coca cultivation area. In its 2005 report, the results show that aerial fumigation and manual eradication of coca fields effectively reduced Colombia's coca cultivation area from 163,000 hectares in 2000 to some 86,000 hectares in 2005. However, different sources indicate widely varying numbers on the size of the coca cultivation areas in Colombia. The Center for International Policy's Colombia Program mentions 144,000 hectares of cultivated coca in 2005 and the Colombian government indicates a figure of close to 175,000 hectares of cultivated coca for 2006.

Although, according to several sources, in the past years the coca cultivation area in Colombia diminished, in 2005 Colombia was the principal world producer of coca leaves and processed cocaine. According to the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), more than 80 percent of worldwide powder cocaine and as much as 90 percent of cocaine consumed in the US are produced in Colombia. More than two-thirds of the cocaine available in Europe comes from Colombia.

Carolin Krauss
MA Social Anthropology

1.1 INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Vienna, Austria

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime releases the World Drug Report annually with analysis on developments in the field of drugs and crime. The site has a database with all UN Crime and Drug Conventions.

The Colombian site of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Bogotá, Colombia

This site highlights the office's work in Colombia and includes a list of publications as well as a links list on Colombia and drugs. This site is in Spanish.

Colombia Coca Cultivation Survey

This 2005 report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Bogotá, Colombia, and the government of Colombia holds extensive information on coca cultivation and production in Colombia.

Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD) by the Organization of American States (OAS), Washington DC, US

This site contains information about alternative development in Colombia and the Colombian national anti-drug plan. It is also available in Spanish.

Estudio de los efectos del Programa de Erradicación de Cultivos Ilícitos mediante la aspersión aérea con el herbicida Glifosato (PECIG) y de los cultivos ilícitos en la salud humana y en el medio ambiente

This March 2005 report by the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD), OAS, Washington, DC, US, evaluates the effects of the herbicide glyphosate used for the control of illicit coca and poppy cultivations in Colombia on human health and the environment.

1.2 GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

1.2.1 Colombia

Cultivos Ilícitos, Impacto Ambiental y Erradicación by the Dirección Nacional de Estupefacientes, Bogotá, Colombia

This site offers information on illicit drug cultivation, the eradication program, the impact on the

environment and statistics on drug cultivation in Colombia. It includes a complaint section for individuals who have been affected by the spraying of their licit crops with glyphosate. It also has information about the monitoring system for illicit cultivation (SIMCI). This site is in Spanish.

Estrategia de la Armada Nacional contra el Narcoterrorismo, Cerrando Espacios

This April 2003 publication by the Armada Nacional, Bogotá, Colombia, focuses on strategies to better control the national territory and fight narcoterrorism. The publication is in Spanish.

Observatorio de drogas de Colombia (O.D.C.), by the Dirección Nacional de Estupefacientes (DNE), Bogotá, Colombia

This site includes a database with information on different subjects concerning drugs and drug trafficking in Colombia. It also offers statistics, publications, campaigns and a list of the most important international partners of the ODC. The site is in Spanish, the introduction is also available in English.

Programa Presidencial Contra Cultivos Ilícitos by the Agencia Presidencial para la Acción Social y la Cooperación Internacional, Bogotá, Colombia

This homepage has extensive information on the programs “Familias Guardabosques” (forest warden families), “Grupo Móvil de Erradicación” (mobile eradication group) and “Proyectos Productivos” (productive projects). Their aim is to offer legal and stable employment or income alternatives for small farmers that are affected by coca cultivation. This site is in Spanish.

Dirección Antinarcóticos by the Policía Nacional Colombiana, Bogotá, Colombia

This site comprises sections on work areas of the directorate, effects of aerial spraying with glyphosate, drugs in general and a daily bulletin with information on recent results. The site is in Spanish.

Plan Nacional de Lucha contra las Drogas: Colombia 1998-2002

This project proposition by the Dirección Nacional de Estupefacientes (DNE), Bogotá, Colombia, analyzes the drug problem in Colombia, informs about the given institutional and legal framework, and elaborates strategies and principles as well as concrete goals and action-plans for the war on drugs and drug trafficking.

1.2.2 United States

National Drug Threat Assessment 2007

This October 2006 publication by the National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC) in Washington DC, US, includes sections on cocaine and drug money laundering. The report provides a strategic overview and predictive outlook of the threat to the US from the illicit trafficking and use of cocaine and other drugs.

Aid to Colombia: The European Role in the Fight Against Narcoterrorism

This 18 November 2004 testimony by Robert Charles, Assistant Secretary for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs at the US Department of State, Washington, DC, US, discusses the US' efforts to promote European assistance in the war on drugs in Colombia and identifies where greater assistance is needed. It also gives an overview of the Bureau of

International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) achievements in the field of counternarcotics in Colombia.

Drug Control: International Policy and Approaches

This May 2004 publication by the Congressional Research Service (CRS) of the Library of Congress, Washington, DC, US, provides information on US drug control policy and US initiatives in combating narcotics production and trade in Colombia and beyond.

1.3 NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

Online Library of Drug Policy by the Drug Reform Coordination Network (DRCNet) in Washington, DC, US

This site holds a wide variety of links to library archives as well as drug policy organizations.

Colombia Program by the Center for International Policy (CIP), Washington DC, US

This site comprises a list of analyses, information on US military and police aid in Colombia and news links. It also has a links library that focuses on issues such as: US and Colombian politics, peace and security, drug policy, and human rights. A part of this site is also available in Spanish.

War and Drugs in Colombia

This January 2005 report by the International Crisis Group (Crisis Group), Brussels, Belgium, discusses interconnections between drugs and the internal conflict in Colombia. The report is also available in Spanish.

1.4 RESEARCH AND ACADEMIA

Drugs and Democracy project by the Transnational Institute (TNI), Amsterdam, Netherlands

This site includes a section that lists reports on drugs and conflict in Colombia as well as a links library on Colombia. The site is also available in Spanish.

Drug Policy Briefing

This June 2005 policy briefing by the Transnational Institute (TNI), Amsterdam, Netherlands, deals with the CICAD study on the impact of glyphosate and crop figures, provides an analysis of the study and points out methodological weaknesses. The policy briefing is also available in Spanish.

Illegal Drugs in Colombia: from illegal economic boom to social crisis

This January 2002 publication by the Latin American and Caribbean Center (LACC) of the Florida International University, Miami, US, analyzes the role illegal drugs play in the crisis of the Colombian society.

The United States and Illegal Crops in Colombia: The Tragic Mistake of Futile Fumigation

This June 2003 Working Paper by the Center for Latin American Studies (CLAS) of the University of California, Berkeley, US, gives an overview of the history of fumigation in Colombia and discusses its outcome.

1.5 MEDIA

Prensa Latina, La Habana, Cuba

This Latin American News Agency offers the latest news on Colombia and the war against drugs. The site is also available in Spanish.

Section on Colombia by the Media Awareness Project, Irvine, US

This project is a worldwide network dedicated to drug policy reform. The site includes articles on drug policy reform in Colombia from a variety of news sources.

Buenaventura: A cocaine export center

This 31 August 2006 article by ISN Security Watch, Zurich, Switzerland, discusses cocaine trafficking developments in the Colombian seaport Buenaventura.

1.5.3 Colombian Newspaper

Ecuador presenta enérgica protesta a Colombia por reanudación de fumigaciones con glifosato

This news article from 07 February 2007 by El Tiempo, Bogotá, Colombia, is about the aerial spraying of coca crops at the Ecuadorian border by Colombia and the resulting diplomatic difficulties between the two countries. The article is in Spanish.

En un vuelo especial, las autoridades de Colombia traen al narcotraficante alias ‘Rasguño’ deportado por Cuba

This article from 07 February 2007 by La Semana, Bogotá, Colombia, highlights the deportation of a Colombian drug lord and strategist of the “Norte del Valle” cartel from Cuba, where he was captured, to Bogotá. It also gives background information on the drug lord’s negotiations with the US. The article is in Spanish.

¿La economía se libró de la plaga del narcodólar?

This 08 February 2007 article by El País, Cali, Colombia, analyzes the question whether or not the influence of illegal money on the Cali economy has diminished. The author concludes that although the authorities tracked down several money-laundering operations and controls have been intensified, the discovery of hideouts shows that drug money is still entering the country in large amounts. The article is in Spanish.

La guerra perdida contra la coca

This interactive online special by La Semana, Bogotá, Colombia, offers analysis on the strategy change in the war against coca, gives information about coca cultivation in the different Colombian regions, about fumigation and the environment, as well as alternatives for productive projects and an analysis on the success of Plan Colombia. The special is in Spanish.