U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

Plan Colombia: Major Successes and New Challenges

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Mr. Chairman, Congressman Lantos, and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the invitation to discuss our programs in Colombia, the potential of drug spillover to Peru, and the fight against narcoterrorism. With the critical support of Congress, we have achieved important successes on many fronts, and I believe that if we continue our support, the Government of Colombia will continue to make advances that directly benefit the United States. For this reason, I want to express my appreciation to you, Mr. Chairman, and members of this Committee and staff for your steadfast and constructive support.

During Secretary Rice's recent trip to Colombia, she said, "You don't stop in midstream on something that has been very effective. It took a long time to get the program started, and it's going to take a little while to eliminate the problem." I repeat that message to you here today--we have come a long way, but difficult challenges still lie ahead.

Briefly, drug seizures and crop eradication are at record levels. Kidnappings, massacres, and murders are down significantly. The Colombian people are now talking about peace as something that could really happen in their lifetimes. All of these success stories create a powerful argument for continued assistance to Colombia, so that this hard earned momentum is not lost. Congress has recognized the need to build on these successes and has continued to provide strong, bipartisan support to Colombia.

Plan Colombia will end at the close of fiscal year 2005. Our support to Colombia should not end, however. While the Government of Colombia has not formally presented a follow-on to Plan Colombia, it has consulted with us on future programs, and we will work with Congress to seek continued support.

Former Secretary of State John Foster Dulles once said, "The measure of success is not whether you have a tough problem to deal with, but whether it is the same problem you had last year." The challenge of illicit narcotics in Colombia is certainly a tough problem; however, it is one that has changed for the better--because of the significant progress achieved by the Government of Colombia working in partnership with the United States. We need to continue to build on these successes for the good of Colombia, the U.S., our hemisphere, and the world.

Turning for a moment to Peru, we are cognizant of the ripple effect that Colombian successes could have on Peru and elsewhere in the region. As coca and opium cultivation is reduced in Colombia, there could be increased cultivation in neighboring countries. And as pressure is put on drug trafficking and narcoterrorist organizations in Colombia, these criminal groups could establish themselves in Peru and elsewhere. The potential for a spillover effect is the focus of regular consultations between our Andean-assigned Ambassadors and their country teams, and the theme of many agreements in force among Andean nations to exchange information and intelligence on cross-border narcotics and terrorist activities. In Peru, there has been no dramatic shift in illicit crop cultivation or drug-related activities that would indicate the existence of a spillover or "balloon effect" from the successful efforts in Colombia. There was an estimated 6 percent decrease in mature coca cultivation in traditional growing areas in Peru for 2004 over 2003. However, we are not lulled into complacency by that number, since Peruvian eradication forces on the ground have observed substantial new plantings that, if left alone, will negate our eradication progress in the near future. Therefore, we need to remain forceful in moving ahead with our eradication efforts in Peru.

I share the Committee's concern over the role of Peruvian opium poppy cultivation. Although we do not have a good technical survey to tell us how much poppy is being cultivated, we are actively working to find a method to measure it in the inaccessible, cloud-covered elevations where it is cultivated. In an effort to survey the crop, we have sent an aircraft (Thrush) to Peru to do an aerial survey. The plane is at work now, and we hope to begin marking off geographic areas for further investigation. The Peruvian National Police, with support from Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), has also made opium cultivation and heroin production and trafficking priority issues, which has resulted in some recent interdiction successes. We also are supporting an active public diplomacy campaign to encourage Peruvian citizens to report sightings of opium poppy being grown.

Our efforts in Peru have also been complicated by recent incidents in coca growing areas that signal increased activity by remnants of the old Shining Path terrorist movement in supporting drug trafficking. The Peruvian Government is aware of this development and has mounted an aggressive campaign to pursue these terrorist elements before they gain a foothold in coca-growing communities and radicalize outlying areas. For all of the above reasons, we have set up a Peru interagency working group, as we have long had on Colombia, to discuss our current Peruvian support efforts, and we will be revamping our cocaine and opium strategy for the near future.

While every country program is different, there are certain themes that guide our efforts, whether it is Peru or Colombia. To give you a flavor of the comprehensiveness of our policy and programs in the Andes, I return to Colombia to discuss our successes in the areas of eradication, interdiction, institutional development, and alternative development. The other witnesses on this panel here with me today can elaborate further on these themes.

Eradication

Eradication is the cornerstone of our counternarcotics efforts in Colombia. At least a third of the State Department's counternarcotics and law enforcement budget is dedicated--either directly or indirectly--to this endeavor. We are reducing supply by destroying the drugs at their source, where they are stationary and thus easier to identify and locate. In 2004, Colombia, working closely with the United States, aerially sprayed a record 136,551 hectares (more than 300,000 acres) of coca and over 3,000 hectares (some 7,000 acres) of opium poppy. The 114,100 hectares of coca under cultivation at the end of 2004 represented a 33 percent reduction from the peak-growing year of 2001 when almost 170,000 hectares of illicit coca were under cultivation. While the 2004 cultivation numbers from the Crime and Narcotics Center (CNC) were very similar to 2003, the potential production of cocaine was down in Colombia by 7 percent. This reduction is due to the greater number of young plants being cultivated, as the narcoterrorists plant more fields in an attempt to negate our record spray efforts. These younger plants are not as productive as old growth plants. We have to move aggressively to defeat the traffickers' countermeasures. Now is not the time to wilt in our efforts, and we are moving aggressively to spray as many hectares as possible. We are on a record pace thus far this year.

Related to Colombia's reductions, overall production of coca in the entire Andean region has dropped as well. Combined cultivation of coca in Bolivia,

Peru, and Colombia went from 224,000 hectares in 2001 to 166,200 hectares in 2004--an astounding reduction of 26 percent--after decades of consistent increases. These numbers clearly demonstrate that the so-called balloon or spillover effect has been averted.

The Colombians have achieved similar progress in the eradication of opium poppy, which I know is of special concern to this Committee. Cultivation of opium poppy in Colombia was reduced by over 65 percent in 2004.

I would be remiss if I did not address the concerns about potential effects of the aerial eradication of these illicit crops on human health and the environment. As a matter of policy and U.S. law, we take environmental and health concerns very seriously in the spray program in Colombia.

- We adhere to a higher level of environmental safety in Colombia than in any comparable program in the world--governmental or private sector--that uses herbicides.
- We comply with all Colombian environmental laws and regulations, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has very rigorously--and favorably--reviewed the program on three occasions.
- Since we began a rigorous monitoring program three years ago, no cases of serious damage to human health or the environment have been scientifically verified.

The scientific evidence of the safety of aerial spraying stands in stark contrast to the environmental devastation caused by illicit cultivation and drug processing. I have flown over huge tracts of land in Colombia, including National Parks, that are simply barren from the erosion caused by illicit cultivation. Environmental degradation does not end there. Over seventy chemicals, including many that have been given the highest toxicity rating by the EPA, are routinely used in the cultivation and processing of illicit narcotics without regard to the manufacturer's instructions, EPA product warnings, or safe environmental practices. These chemicals destroy the land and pollute waterways. Illicit cultivation and drug processing--very sadly--are quickly destroying some of the richest and most varied biodiversity in the world. In a little over a decade, it is estimated that illicit cultivation of drugs in Colombia has destroyed almost three million acres of rain and cloud forest. If we do not stop this now, the destruction will continue.

The Organization of American States (OAS) recently published a rigorous scientific study that clearly concludes that the U.S.-supported aerial spray program in Colombia poses no serious risk to human health. It also unequivocally states that the damage to the environment caused by the illicit narcotic cultivation and processing is significantly more serious than any incidental damage caused by the spray program.

Interdiction

Interdiction efforts are central to the continuing success of our counternarcotics programs in Colombia. The United States provides technical assistance, training, and equipment to Colombia's armed forces and police to allow them to forcibly seize and destroy illicit drugs. I want to stress that U.S. forces or agents do not engage in interdiction in Colombia. The Colombians themselves are doing the heavy lifting--and doing it quite well, I might add. Colombian forces reported record seizures of 175 metric tons of cocaine and coca base used to make cocaine in 2004. If sold on U.S. streets, we estimate an additional $2 billion would have gone to U.S. drug peddlers and the narcoterrorists they support. The 2004 seizures represent an increase of almost 120 percent over the 80 metric tons seized in 2001. In fact, cocaine seizures in Colombia have steadily increased every year since 2001. Interdiction is particularly painful to the narcotraffickers, because it takes away their product at a more advanced stage in the value-added chain; thereby denying them that which they desire most--profits.

Institutional Development

Through successful eradication and interdiction, the United States Government is undermining the narcotics industry, while at the same time advancing democracy and strengthening security throughout Colombia through the joint efforts of the State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL), U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and Department of Justice programs that build up the democratic institutions providing security and justice. We have helped fund the establishment of police units in 158 municipalities, many of which had not seen any government presence in decades. For the first time in the recorded history of Colombia, all 1,098 of Colombia's municipalities (the equivalent to our country seats) are under the control of federal authorities. This is an enormous step forward for the people of Colombia and their democratically elected government.

John Locke wrote, "Where there is security and a stable social compact, people will abide the law and mix their labor with the land in a legitimate, lasting way." Colombia has lacked a secure, stable society for decades, but President Uribe's democratic security policies are bringing much needed change. In Colombia, we are seeing real success, and the people of Colombia are benefiting from improved security and stability and respect for the rule of law.

To enhance the rule of law, our projects have assisted the Government of Colombia in establishing 38 Justice Houses (*Casas de Justicia* in Spanish), which provide access to justice for poor Colombians. Make no mistake: this is not a small victory or goal--it is at the very heart, in our view, of sustainable progress and U.S. support for defeating narcoterrorists and advancing democracy. So far, these *Casas de Justicia* have handled almost three million cases, easing the burden on the over-taxed judicial system.

At the same time, we have helped establish 35 new Oral Trial courtrooms and trained over 10,000 lawyers, judges, and public defenders in oral legal procedures similar to those in the U.S. This new system is designed to reduce impunity, provide transparency, and accelerate the traditionally slow judicial process.

A key component of developing democratic institutions is to ensure respect for basic human rights. In the last few years, Colombia has made great strides in the area of human rights and alleged abuses are down when compared to historic levels. However, we continue to be concerned over the lack of progress in Colombia on specific cases involving the Colombia military. We are engaging the Government of Colombia at all levels to make progress on specific cases that involved the military. Some $32.5 million of 2004 INL money is currently on hold as a result of limited progress on these specific cases, and at least a similar amount in 2005 will be held as well. The Government of Colombia has assured us that it is committed to making progress on this issue, and we will continue to engage them at all levels.

Alternative Development

Consolidating gains and sustaining progress requires that those who grow and harvest coca or opium poppy are not only discouraged from involvement in the drug trade, but also encouraged to enter legitimate markets. Alternative development complements interdiction and eradication programs by opening up new, legal economic opportunities for former and potential producers of coca and poppy. A little less than one-third of the Colombia counternarcotics budget is spent on alternative development and related programs. The alternative development programs, initially concentrated in the Departments of Putumayo and Caquetá (areas with Colombia's densest coca cultivation), have now expanded into other departments with high

incidence or threat of coca cultivation. In 2004, our efforts have promoted the cultivation of well over 10,000 hectares (24,000 acres) of legal crops, for a cumulative total of over 50,000 hectares (140,000 acres) since 2000, while benefiting more than 50,000 families. We work closely with USAID here in Washington, and in the field, to ensure our programs are complementary.

Alternative development is more than alternative crops. It also includes activities that improve Colombia's rural infrastructure, so that licit crops and products can be transported and marketed. Last year alone, over 200 infrastructure projects were completed for a total of almost 900 since 2001. Our projects have built more than 90 schools, 40 potable water systems, and 80 municipal buildings--ranging from homes for the elderly to business centers and community centers. Projects completed also include 195 sewage projects and 35 key roads. A total of 220 municipalities now have improved public services. In short, U.S.-supported alternative development projects in Colombia are reinforcing the core functions and values that underpin Colombia's democratic civil society and increasing the presence and legitimacy of the state.

Challenges Ahead

Although we have seen an extraordinary level of achievement in the fight against illegal narcotics in Colombia, many challenges lie ahead for Colombia, its Andean allies, and U.S. counternarcotics programs.

One of the biggest challenges we face it is the nationalization of the program. Our ultimate goal is to help Colombia build the capacity necessary to face the narcoterrorist threat while reducing the burden on the U.S. taxpayer. Due to the courage and aggressive action of President Uribe and his government, we have seen an increase in the pace of operations that was not contemplated a few years ago. This increase in the pace of operations has produced very positive results, but has limited our ability to nationalize programs. The Government of Colombia shares in our goal of nationalization and has doubled its share of GDP devoted to security issues to 5 percent in the last four years. A good example of Colombia's determination is the government's plans to purchase eight Black Hawk helicopters using their own funds in the coming year. Many of our aviation programs are moving towards nationalization in terms of personnel, but the Government of Colombia still needs assistance in many critical areas, and we are providing it in an efficient and professional manner.

On paper, Plan Colombia is ending, but on the ground consolidating our successes is really just beginning. Our primary area of support is still the eradication of coca and poppy via the aerial eradication program combined with alternative development. There has been an almost 33 percent reduction in coca cultivation in Colombia since 2001 and 68 percent drop in poppy cultivation. We need to ensure that illicit crops are further reduced and eventually eliminated.

Concluding Remarks

I again want to thank you for the opportunity to share with the Committee some of the important work we are doing in partnership with the Government of Colombia. Your support is crucial to our continued success in this endeavor. Our support to bring an end to narcoterrorism in Colombia will bring major benefits to the U.S., and our hemisphere. We must continue building on the successes achieved to date.

Thank you for the opportunity to highlight the progress we have made in Colombia.

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