



THE WHITE HOUSE

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH

[Home](#) > [News & Policies](#) > [August 2006](#)

For Immediate Release
Office of the Press Secretary
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Statement on U.S. Drug Interdiction Assistance to the Government of Colombia

The President has authorized the Department of State to continue assistance to Colombia in carrying out an "Airbridge Denial (ABD) Program" against civil aircraft reasonably suspected of trafficking in illicit drugs. In granting this authorization, the President has determined that Colombia has put in place appropriate procedures to protect against loss of innocent life in connection with interdiction operations. The United States Department of State, with the support of other U.S. agencies, has the ability to continue to work with the Government of Colombia to ensure effective counternarcotics operations while observing strict adherence to agreed-upon and well-established safety procedures.

BACKGROUND

Through the 1980s and 1990s, drug organizations turned increasingly to aircraft to move cocaine base and paste from Bolivia and Peru to processing labs in Colombia for final processing and transport to the United States. In the early 1990s, the United States Government supported the aerial interdiction efforts of the Governments of Colombia and Peru, which were designed to disrupt the aerial transport of illicit drugs in those countries' airspace. In April 2001, following the accidental shutdown by the Peruvian Air Force of an aircraft carrying United States missionaries, the United States suspended its support for both the Peruvian and Colombian programs. In August 2003, after the United States and Colombia agreed upon new procedures, oversight measures, and reporting criteria and after the President made the requisite certification under United States law, the United States and Colombia initiated the Air Bridge Denial Program. This involves U.S. support for the Government of Colombia's efforts to interdict aircraft that are reasonably suspected to be primarily engaged in illicit drug trafficking. This will be the fourth Presidential Determination for the Colombia ABD Program.

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