

## **IDPC POSITION PAPER**

### **EFFORTS TO REDUCE THE SUPPLY OF DRUGS SHOULD NOT FOCUS ON THE PUNISHMENT OF GROWERS**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The International Drug Policy Consortium (IDPC) is a global network of 26 NGOs and professional networks that specialise in issues related to illegal drug production and use. The Consortium aims to promote objective and open debate on the effectiveness, direction and content of drug policies at the national and international level, and supports evidence-based policies that are effective in reducing drug-related harm. It produces occasional briefing papers, disseminates the reports of its member organizations about particular drug-related matters, and offers expert consultancy services to policymakers and officials around the world.

IDPC members have a wide range of experience and expertise in the analysis of drug policies, and have contributed to policy debates at the national and international level. Several members have been involved in the creation or evaluation of drug policies and strategies in an official government or academic role. Following a review of currently available evidence, Consortium members have agreed to promote 5 fundamental drug policy principles in our advocacy work with governments and international agencies. These principles are summarised in a short position paper ([http://www.idpc.info/docs/IDPC\\_5\\_Principles.pdf](http://www.idpc.info/docs/IDPC_5_Principles.pdf)) that is available on the Consortium website ([www.idpc.info](http://www.idpc.info)).

This paper expands one of these five principles – that international efforts to control the supply of illicit drugs should not target law enforcement efforts on the farmers who grow the crops deviated to the illicit market. Rather, a more humane and effective policy would promote alternative livelihoods, economic development, and conflict resolution in areas of current cultivation, and would target law enforcement efforts on the national and international criminal organizations and networks that make the largest profits from synthesizing and distributing illegal substances.

#### **BACKGROUND**

The world's supply of crop-based illicit drugs is provided by a relatively small number of countries. The South American countries of Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia are the primary source of coca, the raw material for cocaine, while poppy, the raw material for opium and heroin, is grown primarily in Afghanistan and to a lesser extent in Myanmar. Pakistan, Lao PDR, Colombia and Mexico have smaller or very small levels of poppy cultivation.

While both the U.S. government and the United Nations (UN) provide annual estimates of coca and poppy cultivation, there is tremendous uncertainty inherent in the measurements, as indicated by the differences in the two sets of data. While the U.S. statistics indicate relative stability in production, the UN statistics show some decline for coca. According to the U.S. government estimates, over the last two decades coca production in the Andes has remained remarkably constant at approximately 200,000 hectares, though there have been significant variations in the amount grown in each country. However, despite the lower

calculation of coca hectares by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), it estimates virtually no change in the global potential cocaine production. Colombia now produces well over half of the region's coca supply. In contrast, opium poppy production is now extremely concentrated in Afghanistan, which produces almost 90 percent of the world's supply.

Another illicit crop subject to forced eradication is cannabis, which is the most widely trafficked and widely consumed drug worldwide. However, according to the UNODC, there are no reliable estimates of the size of the global market or even data on where the supply originates. Cannabis can be grown in virtually any country and is increasingly grown indoors in developed countries. Although some countries attempt to produce their own national statistics, they tend to be unreliable and accurate worldwide production estimates are simply too hard to calculate.

Both coca and poppy growing regions are characterized by poor conditions for sustainable agricultural production, lack of infrastructure and poor accessibility. These remote regions have little access to markets for alternative agricultural products, nor the means of transportation to get crops there. The presence of state agencies is limited or non-existent and farmers lack access to credit, technical assistance or other services. For the most part, small farmers grow food for subsistence and a small amount of coca or poppy as their only source of cash income. It allows for additional purchases of food and basic supplies, but living conditions for the families involved are often barely at subsistence level. Growing crops which may be deviated to the illicit market is essential for family survival. Yet these farmers are more often than not considered and treated as criminals. In fact, it is often easier to target law enforcement efforts at small farmers rather than the drug traffickers who have the resources to bribe and coerce police and other officials.

## **THE FAILURE OF FORCED ERADICATION EFFORTS TO DATE**

In Latin America to date, forced eradication of coca crops – including aerial spraying in Colombia – has met with little success in terms of long-term impact on the illicit drug market. While some significant short-term gains have been achieved, these have proven unsustainable in the medium or long term as crops are quickly replanted, or cultivation displaced to other areas. Lacking viable economic alternatives, more often than not, poor farmers replant. They often begin utilizing smaller plots and interspersing coca or poppy plants under vegetation that makes it harder to detect. Moreover, the emergence and spread of higher yield crops means that more illicit drugs can be produced from smaller plots. These changes in the nature of production and the dispersion of crops to new areas have created even greater challenges for those implementing anti-drug programs.

In addition, price incentives work to counter the impact of eradication. If successful in the short-term, eradication drives up farm-gate prices, making it more profitable for farmers to continue cultivation and enticing others to join them. In other words, eradication can actually provide incentives for continued or new cultivation. A 2005 World Bank report on Afghanistan states: “A key lesson is that eradication alone will not work and is likely to be counterproductive, resulting in perverse incentives for farmers to grow more drugs (sic) (for example, in Colombia), and displacement of production to more remote areas...”<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, perhaps the best example of policy failure is Colombia, despite the billions of dollars in U.S., European and UN assistance that has poured into the country in recent years. When Colombia's coca boom began in the 1990s, coca was concentrated in three departments. Yet despite the aerial spraying campaign and the launching of “Plan Colombia,” coca has spread throughout the country and can now be found in 23 of the country's 32 departments. Initially, coca was found on large plantations; these have now largely disappeared as over 90 percent of coca is grown on plots of less than three hectares. The UNODC also reports that more families are involved in coca cultivation, again indicating that production is proliferating.

Drug production can flourish even when crops destined for the illicit market are significantly curtailed. For example, coca production in Peru dropped precipitously in the 1990s as production shifted to Colombia. Yet at the same time, Peruvian drug traffickers developed linkages with Mexican and Brazilian trafficking

organizations that allowed the country to become a significant exporter of cocaine. A similar situation occurred in Afghanistan during the Taliban ban on poppy production in the areas under its control in 2000. As there was no parallel ban on opium production, drug traffickers who stockpiled opium experienced a windfall. Those hardest hit by the poppy ban were desperately poor farmers, while drug traffickers benefited from exceptionally high profits.

With regards to opium poppy cultivation, in 2006 the UNODC reported an 18 percent decrease in the area under cultivation worldwide, but only a 5 percent decrease in global opium production. This was largely due to more favourable weather conditions in Afghanistan during the 2005 growing season, as well as improved production techniques. Despite ongoing forced eradication efforts, cultivation in that country has increased to an estimated 172,600 hectares.<sup>2</sup> 2007 is promising to be a bumper year, as was 2006. To date, successful forced eradication efforts have been short-lived. For example, a significant reduction in poppy production in the Nangarhar province led to a precipitous drop in incomes and access to credit; economic activity in the province declined in most sectors. In response, production in the Nangarhar increased significantly in 2006. Despite this and similar experiences in other areas, the emphasis on forced crop eradication efforts continues, with potentially explosive circumstances, as described below.

There have, however, been instances of successful reduction of cultivation in other countries, and lessons need to be learned on how this was achieved. In stark contrast to Afghanistan and coca and poppy in the Latin American region, some Asian countries have successfully curtailed or eliminated opium poppy cultivation. Both Vietnam and Thailand are now considered opium poppy-free, while Pakistan, Myanmar (Burma) and Lao PDR have all significantly reduced opium production. However, the sharp recent crop reductions in Myanmar and Lao PDR in the absence of alternative income opportunities have caused humanitarian crisis that cast doubt upon their sustainability.

In the case of Thailand, the decline was the result of comprehensive and participatory economic development and nation-building efforts sustained over a long period of time. Quality of life was improved in rural communities through ensuring food security, infrastructure development, provision of services such as health care and education, and efforts to reduce local opium consumption. These were accompanied by expanded agricultural services and the promotion of cash crops, as well as other income generating projects; only after these began to bear fruit and local incomes increased were poppy reduction efforts undertaken and these were carried out in collaboration with local communities. Bolivia is now adopting a similar approach, though its strategy also incorporates allowing continued coca production for licit uses.

It is important to note, however, that while this approach was successful in Thailand in virtually eliminating opium poppy cultivation, it did not lead to reduced opium production worldwide, as production shifted to other countries. In addition, as the supply of opium in Thailand decreased, demand shifted to heroin which in turn caused an increase in the incidence of HIV/AIDS.

## **NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES**

In the face of the evidence of the failure to reduce significantly the supply of crops needed as raw materials for producing illicit drugs, the policymakers who support continued forced eradication efforts – and hence the criminalization of small scale farmers who produce crops deviated to the illicit market – argue that production of illicit drugs would be even worse without the programs presently in place. Yet this assessment fails to take into account the significant counterproductive and negative consequences of forced crop eradication.

Perhaps of greatest significance, the eradication of coca or poppy crops upon which farmers and their families depend prior to the establishment of alternative sources of cash income pushes people deeper into poverty. In this sense, international drug control programs directly conflict with the development objectives of other UN agencies such as the UN Development Program (UNDP) and multilateral institutions such as the World Bank. As in most cases forced eradication has far outpaced the provision of economic

alternatives, it has devastated communities in Latin America and Asia. The loss of the only source of cash income forces families to sell off livestock and land, and to abandon school and health services. As the areas where these crops are grown are also the most marginalized, this also means that for many local farmers, their primary interaction with the state is via repressive anti-drug programs.

Research conducted in 2002 and 2003 by the UNODC and published in 2005 in the Kokang Special Region 1 in Myanmar found that eradication led to a 50 percent drop in school enrolment and that two of every three pharmacies and medical practitioners shut down. Those conducting the research concluded that the rapid elimination of the farmers' primary source of cash income caused "economic and social harm to the region."<sup>3</sup> A UN study in Peru came to a similar conclusion. In evaluating the impact of a palm-oil project in Aguaytía, the UNODC concluded in a 2005 report that in areas where coca production was widespread, farmers reported that their quality of life fell following the voluntary eradication program. As is the norm in U.S.-funded programs, the farmers first had to eradicate in order to receive technical assistance, but their palm trees needed time to mature and produce. In the meantime, farmers were left with no source of income. Farmers complained that they were coerced into the program, because if they did not participate their crops would have been forcibly eradicated.<sup>4</sup> In the end, violent protests ensued and farmers forced some alternative development workers to leave the region.

In Afghanistan, the dangers of forced eradication prior to the provision of alternative livelihoods are even greater. Poppy cultivation provides some two million farmers with an estimated one-half billion US dollars annually in subsistence income, with several hundred million more provided to wage labourers. Many Afghan farmers are plagued with poppy-related debt that requires them to continue cultivation and can even lead to farmers being forced to sell their under-age daughters in marriage to pay it off. In 2005, the World Bank warned that "an abrupt shrinkage of the opium economy or falling opium prices without new means of livelihood would significantly worsen rural poverty."<sup>5</sup> It is also a boon to local warlords and the Taliban, which benefit from popular discontent and anti-government sentiments.

Given the state's already weak presence in coca and poppy producing regions, the conflict that inevitably results with the local population during and following forced eradication campaigns undermines local authority and weakens what is often already tenuous support for the national government. Ultimately, the state is discredited – a particularly dangerous development when insurgent groups are also present. In both Peru and Colombia, such policies have alienated the local population and at the same time benefited insurgency movements. Aerial herbicide spraying of coca and poppy crops in Colombia has pushed people into the ranks of the leftwing guerrillas and rightwing paramilitary groups alike, thereby fuelling the country's decades-old civil conflict.

Decades of forced eradication efforts in Latin America have left a trail of social conflict, political unrest, violence and human rights violations. In Bolivia, for example, U.S.-backed counterdrug efforts led to a disturbing pattern of killings, mistreatment and abuse of the local population and arbitrary detentions by members of local security forces. Government efforts to meet coca eradication targets set by Washington led to massive protests, in which both government forces and coca growers have been killed. Only with the December 2005 election of coca grower leader Evo Morales as President did the cycle of conflict and violence cease.

These potential negative consequences are even greater when aerial herbicide spraying is undertaken. In addition to fuelling political violence and conflict, as noted above, there is ample reason for concern that spraying causes serious harm to the environment and human health, both immediately and in the long-term. Collecting data on health complaints in areas where fumigation occurs is difficult as causality is very hard to determine. However, local health workers in Colombia often report increased skin, respiratory and gastrointestinal problems following aerial spraying. While the scientific evidence is not yet definitive, the widespread perception among Ecuadorians and Colombians alike is that fumigation jeopardizes the region's water sources and rich biodiversity.

The issue remains a subject of heated debate internationally. A 2005 study by the Organization of American States that declared spraying to be relatively safe is widely questioned; in response, the government of Ecuador asked the UN for assistance in determining the impact of fumigation along its border with Colombia. Upon his recent election, President Raphael Correa has renewed efforts to force Colombia to cease spraying along its border with Ecuador because of the environmental and health impacts on the Ecuadorian side. Following an investigation along the border in May 2007, the UN Special Rapporteur on Health, Paul Hunt, announced that he found “credible and reliable evidence” that the aerial spraying causes physical and mental harm to the Ecuadorian residents affected and he called for the spraying along the border to be suspended.<sup>6</sup>

The damage often inflicted upon licit food crops – and hence food security for a very vulnerable segment of the population – is also problematic. In addition to food crops that are targeted directly because they are interspersed with coca, spray drift leads to the unintended consequence of spraying legal crops and cattle grazing fields, as even the U.S. government admits. One investigation found that in 2002 and 2003, aerial spraying caused significant damage to food crops, pasture, livestock, and agricultural development projects.<sup>7</sup> Although a program is in place to provide compensation in these cases, very few of those who have complained actually receive it. According to the U.S. State Department, of approximately 5,500 complaints filed between 2001 and 2005, only twelve individuals received compensation.<sup>8</sup>

Although aerial spraying has been carried out on a massive scale in Colombia, the amount of coca presently detected by the U.S. government remains significantly higher than when the fumigation program was launched. The United States reported 157,000 hectares of coca in Colombia in 2006, a 9 percent increase over 2005 despite a 25 percent increase in the area sprayed.<sup>9</sup> The spraying program in fact appears to be counterproductive, leading to the dispersion of coca throughout the country as described above.

## **AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH**

Given that enforcement efforts targeting cultivation over many years have failed to achieve the objective of a reduction in overall supply of cocaine and heroin, that there are significant and documented costs and negative side-effects of these programs, and that they run counter to UN economic and social development objectives, it is hard to see why these approaches remain at the core of supply side reduction efforts.

In a March 2005 report, the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs stated: “Rather than target peasant illicit-crop growers, as in forced eradication, law enforcement should interdict supply lines – of chemicals or processed or semi-processed drugs – arrest and prosecute traffickers, and disrupt labs and financial markets.”<sup>10</sup> A clear distinction must be made between farmers of crops deviated to illicit markets and those engaged in the actual drug trade. Law enforcement efforts should focus on the latter: targeting the laboratories where illicit drugs are made, disrupting the flow of precursor chemicals needed for illicit drug production and capturing drug traffickers and dismantling their transnational criminal and money laundering networks. The effectiveness of such efforts are questionable with regard to reducing the overall size of the drug market, but well-targeted disruption of the trade may weaken the power of criminal groups or reduce the flow of illegal earnings to armed groups. Law enforcement should also confront the serious problems of corruption at all levels of government that allows the drug trade to flourish in countries like Afghanistan and Colombia.

Farmers should be treated as partners in development, not criminals. For crop reduction efforts to be successful, improving the overall quality of life and providing viable alternative livelihoods are the first essential steps, as evident in the example of Thailand referred to above. A combination of agricultural development and off-farm employment opportunities are needed in most communities. This approach implies allowing continued cultivation of poppy or coca crops while the local economy is strengthened, or as in the case of Bolivia allowing coca production for licit uses. It also implies working with local communities via participatory development models, in both the actual projects and in eventually reducing and eliminating the cultivation of crops for the illicit market. In the case of Afghanistan, while significant

practical challenges exist regarding licensing schemes for licit opium production, a controlled expansion of licit uses of opiates merits further exploration.

With regards to the coca leaf, its inclusion in the number one list of the UN Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961 is a historical error that fails to differentiate between the coca leaf, traditionally used in Andean cultures, and cocaine. Significant scientific evidence exists to show that the coca leaf has no negative health affects or addiction-producing properties and cannot be kept in Schedule I under that false pretext. The fact that cocaine can be extracted from the leaf is also not sufficient justification for its inclusion in Schedule I; even with coca's removal, cocaine would still be controlled under the 1961 Convention. Thus, the coca leaf should be withdrawn from the 1961 schedules.

In areas of civil conflict, such as in Colombia and Afghanistan, local efforts also need a conflict resolution component to reduce the insecurity and violence that prevents successful economic development. These economic and social development activities are the function of the multilateral agencies such as the World Bank and the UNDP, which should take a much greater role in planning and implementing programs in areas where crops deviated to the illicit market are prevalent.

Comprehensive economic development necessitates time and resources and cannot be measured simplistically in terms of the annual crop cultivation statistics presently favoured by most drug policy officials. The measure of long-term success should not be the amount of coca or poppy eradicated, but rather quality of life indicators including conflict resolution and the rule of law. Putting alternative livelihoods first is a more humane and more effective strategy for curbing the production of coca and poppy crops for the manufacture of illegal substances. It is also more consistent with the wider goals of the international community to promote the welfare of the poorest communities on earth, rather than deepen their poverty.

Finally, the impact of any supply-side intervention will depend on global market developments. As long as demand remains high, supply will continue. The relative stability of the global cocaine and opiates markets indicates that governments and international agencies should increasingly be shifting the focus of drug policies from objectives related to the reduction in the scale of the illegal drug market, to objectives that directly address its harmful consequences in terms of human health, welfare, crime, corruption and conflict (for additional information, see IDPC position paper, *Drug Policies Should Shift Focus and Priority From Reducing the Scale of the Drug Market, to Reducing its Negative Consequences*).

#### (Endnotes)

<sup>1</sup> *Afghanistan – State Building, Sustaining Growth and Reducing Poverty* (Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, February 2005), p. 120.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of State, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, March 2007, [www.state.gov/p/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2007/vol1/html/80858.htm](http://www.state.gov/p/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2007/vol1/html/80858.htm).

<sup>3</sup> *Thematic Evaluation of UNODC's Alternative Development Initiatives*, Independent Evaluation Unit of the UNODC, November 2005, pp. 23 – 24.

<sup>4</sup> *Alternative Development: A Global Thematic Evaluation, Final Synthesis Report*, UNODC, March 2005, p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> *Afghanistan – State Building, Sustaining Growth and Reducing Poverty*, pp. 118 – 119.

<sup>6</sup> “Relator de la ONU pide a Colombia suspender fumigaciones en frontera ecuatoriana,” *El Comercio*, 18 May 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Betsy Marsh, *Going to Extremes: The U.S. Funded Aerial Eradication Program in Colombia*, The Latin America Working Group Education Fund, February 2004, p. 2.<sup>8</sup> U.S. Department of State, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, March 2005, [www.state.gov/p/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2005/](http://www.state.gov/p/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2005/).

<sup>9</sup> *New Estimates Show Coca Rising in Colombia, Despite Record Year for Fumigation*, Press Release by the Washington Office on Latin America, 5 June 2007.

<sup>10</sup> *Alternative Development: A Global Thematic Evaluation, Final Synthesis Report*, p. 13.