



BECKLEY FOUNDATION

GERMÁN VARGAS LLERAS

MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR, COLOMBIA

“It is a real pleasure for me that the global drug problems are approached and will be discussed today and tomorrow, without taboos and with an open mind.”

Summary: Minister Vargas Lleras explained the devastating effects of drugs and the war on drugs in Colombia, and outlined Government programmes set up to tackle them.
EFFECTS OF THE WAR ON DRUGS IN COLOMBIA

We need a debate where different points of view can be formulated in a serene manner, and listened to in equal measure. The world should be allowed to investigate and try new drug policies, as long as any reform is the result of serious and objective reflection, and comes from an agreement between all nations involved, taking into account the particularities of each country.

In most European countries, drugs are viewed as a public health problem, but in most Latin American countries, drugs are both a public health and a national security problem. The effects of drugs in Colombia have been devastating, and have been for several decades now the main cause of violence, corruption, death, and dramatic violations to human rights.

TACKLING THE EFFECTS

The Government of Colombia has taken serious steps to deal with drug trafficking. The Government mandates illicit crop eradication, sentencing and extradition of drug traffickers, dissolution of assets produced by trafficking, and fighting laundering of assets and armed illegal groups. However, the Government is also trying alternative development approaches, modernising their legal system and empowering their institutions. For example, Colombia has developed a series of crop substitution programmes to offer lawful options to farmers and to preserve the eco-system.

The drug problem is global; it does not respect borders, and this is a call for joint responsibility. Every nation – producer, transit, or consumer – has the right to try new solutions according to the particular characteristics of its problems; but it also has the duty to look beyond its borders, and to understand that drugs put at risk not only the physical and mental health of the people, but also the national security of many countries, as well as life itself and the freedom of millions.