



# TOXIC POLICY

IMPACTS OF THE U.S WAR ON  
DRUGS IN COLOMBIA

SOLIDARITY  
COLLECTIVE



Witness for Peace Solidarity Collective is a nation-wide grassroots movement of more than 20,000 supporters, members and activists in all U.S states and territories who campaign to end U.S policies and corporate practices that contribute to violence, poverty and oppression in the United States, Latin America and the Caribbean.

We are independent of any government, political party, economic interest or religion and are funded entirely by our grassroots base through small-dollar donations.



# METHODOLOGY

This report is the culmination of research conducted in Colombia from January 5 to January 15, 2013. For the purpose of this study, members of a Witness for Peace Solidarity Collective delegation conducted 74 interviews across four cities: Cali, Popayan, Buenaventura, and Bogota. The delegation met with many people who have lost family members and friends, and whose own lives are in jeopardy after receiving multiple death threats. The informants included lawyers, professors, reporters, indigenous groups, Afro-descendant groups, small-scale farmers (campesinos), union members and clergy.

The meetings also included representatives from 11 organizations, including CIMA (Comité de Integración del Macizo Colombiano/Committee for the Integration of the Macizo, Colombia); the Minga; Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres (Women's Peace Pathway); the CRIC (Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca/Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca); Unión Portuaria de Buenaventura (Buenaventura Portworkers Union); the Federación Colombiana de Pescadores Artesanales (Colombian Artisanal Fisherman's Union); Procesos de Comunidades Negras (Black Community Processes); Galería de la Memoria Tiberio Fernández Mafla (Tiberio Fernández Mafla Memory Gallery); the Comisión Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz (Interfaith Commission of Justice and Peace); and AMDAE (Asociación Mutual para el Desarrollo Integral de la Afrocolombianidad y el Empresarismo/Mutual Association for Holistic Development of Afro-Colombian Identity and Entrepreneurship). What follows are the findings and recommendations of this delegation that were gathered firsthand from leaders of communities greatly impacted by U.S. policies.

Witness for Peace Solidarity Collective would like to thank all those who gave their time to talk to our international team. In particular, Witness for Peace Solidarity Collective thanks the victims of forced displacement, and human rights NGOs accompanying them, who shared their experiences courageously, despite the risks involved. Some of their stories appear in this report.

# INTRODUCTION

The Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs entered into force in 73 nations in 1964, criminalizing the coca leaf for the first time, while also targeting opium and marijuana production for elimination within 25 years. Its schedules were adopted and codified by the 1970 Controlled Substances Act in the United States, marking the beginning of the era of comprehensive U.S. federal prohibition of controlled substances. As the global prohibition of drugs gained momentum, Colombia signed on to the amended Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs in 1972, agreeing under Article 26 to both manual eradication of the coca bush as well as destruction of coca crops grown illegally.

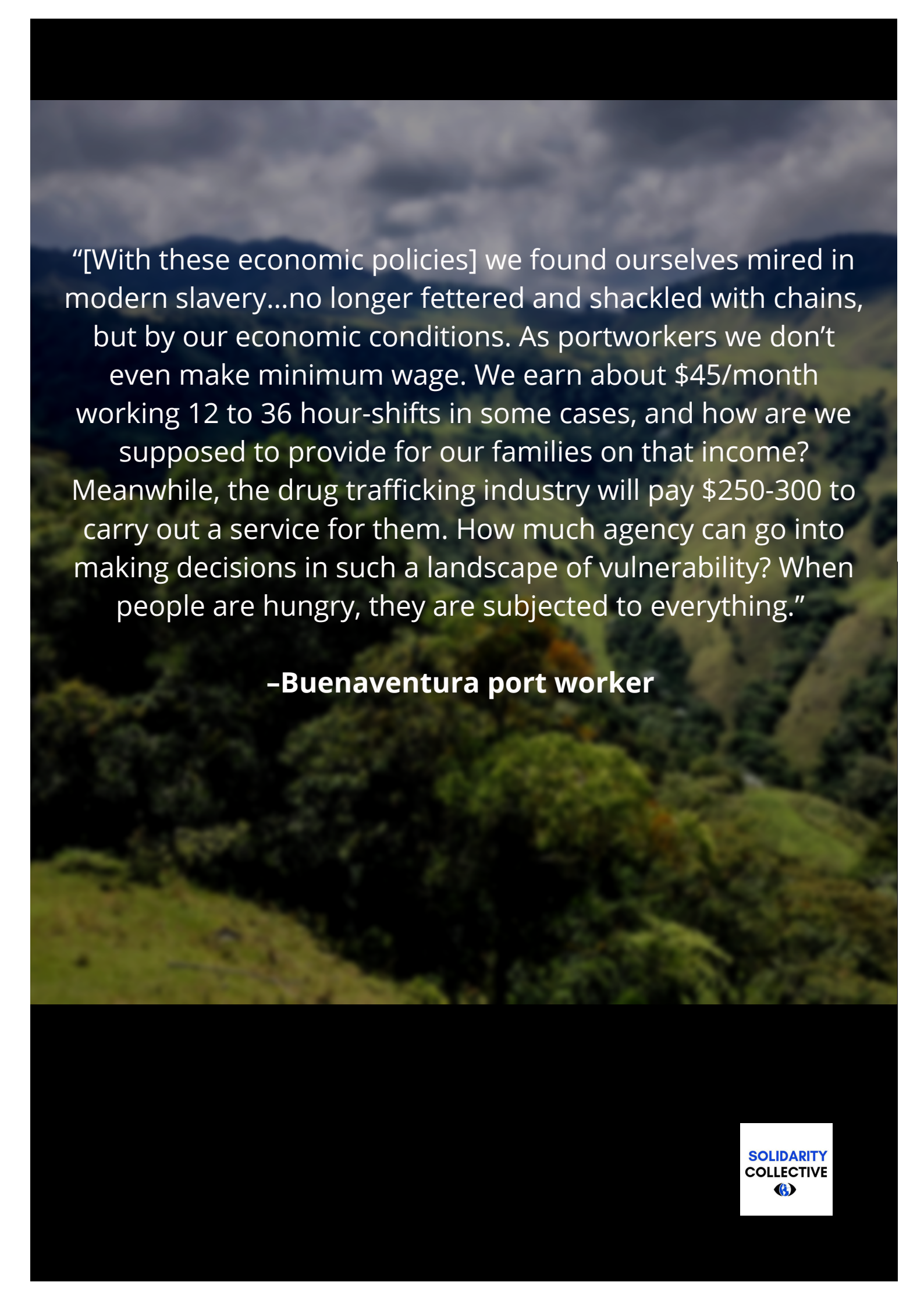
Coca prohibition is problematic in Colombia given the historical roots of coca among indigenous communities in the Andean Plateau, who have considered coca a sacred plant and have used it medicinally—not as an intoxicant or hallucinogen—for at least 10,000 years. Coca has been a target of U.S. military and counter-narcotics policy in Latin America even though it contains less than one percent cocaine alkaloid, which must be chemically extracted from the leaves to synthesize the cocaine that is eventually consumed by North Americans and Europeans.

Traditional small-scale farmers who cultivate coca rarely play a role in the process of cocaine synthesis, which was created by European scientists in the mid-1800s. Despite international laws demanding respect for indigenous cultural values and practices such as the United Nations 2007 Universal Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, ILO Convention 169, as well as the 1991 Colombian Constitution's recognition of the government's duty to respect and protect cultural and ethnic diversity, the Colombian military has engaged in systematic eradication of the crop with substantial financial and technical support from the United States since the 1990s.

Most of these anti-narcotic efforts arose from Plan Colombia, which consisted of fumigation and manual eradication of the coca plant beginning in 2000. Despite more than \$7.3 billion U.S. dollars spent on Plan Colombia as of 2011, it was met with little success in eliminating coca cultivation. Cultivation in Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia, as well as production of cocaine, has remained constant since 2003, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.



Recently, a growing consensus of leaders in Latin America, the United States and elsewhere around the globe, has urged policymakers to develop new strategies for dealing with the societal problems of drug trafficking and addiction. In October, the presidents of Guatemala, Colombia, and Mexico delivered a statement to United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon urging an alternative approach to counter-narcotics policy in Latin America. Moreover, on January 11, 2013, Bolivia was readmitted to the U.N. Single Convention on Narcotics Drugs although coca cultivation is now legal there. These events indicate a recent willingness among world leaders to consider alternatives to outright coca prohibition, in recognition of the damages wreaked by criminalization and eradication policies, especially in Latin America.



“[With these economic policies] we found ourselves mired in modern slavery...no longer fettered and shackled with chains, but by our economic conditions. As portworkers we don't even make minimum wage. We earn about \$45/month working 12 to 36 hour-shifts in some cases, and how are we supposed to provide for our families on that income? Meanwhile, the drug trafficking industry will pay \$250-300 to carry out a service for them. How much agency can go into making decisions in such a landscape of vulnerability? When people are hungry, they are subjected to everything.”

**–Buenaventura port worker**

## SUPPLY-SIDE FOCUS


U.S. drug policy has led to displacement, human rights violations, increased arms trafficking and violence. It has not resulted in a decrease in coca production or in the supply of cocaine. Moreover, U.S. economic policies like market aperture and the passing and implementation of the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement have negatively impacted small-scale economies, increasing economic vulnerability and dependence on coca cultivation as a source of income for survival, and thus counteracting the stated goal of drug eradication. (See Appendix B)

A clear example of the links between economic policy, vulnerability, and involvement in the drug trade can be seen in the Buenaventura ports. There has been a continuing trend over the past decade in the port as the groundwork was being laid for the implementation of the free trade agreement of increasing informal structures of hiring and dismantling labor conditions and organizing efforts. The desperate conditions that these practices have led to have greatly facilitated illegal activity and criminality.

An additional concern is the clear collusion between drug traffickers and the U.S.-funded Colombian armed forces. We heard stories of food and household staples being taken from villagers but police allowing coca to travel freely. On highly militarized roads in the Chocó, roadblocks are established to ensure that villagers are only allowed to carry one gallon of gasoline into their community, despite their need for larger quantities in order to generate electricity. Meanwhile, the presence of paramilitary-controlled cocaine laboratories in the region and the unchallenged arrival of massive amounts of gasoline needed to process coca leaf into cocaine suggest the complicity of the public armed forces.

We also heard testimony from partners at the Interfaith Commission of Justice and Peace as to how Colombian Law 30 of 1986 (National Statute on Narcotics, which allows for the seizure of any land on which coca is being grown) has been used to perpetuate violence and displacement of vulnerable communities. There is concern that illegal armed actors, often tied to the same groups responsible for previous displacements, may use this legal framework to once again take possession of land by entering a collective territory and growing coca on it, thus causing the original owners to permanently lose the title to the land due to the presence of coca cultivation there. This poses a serious threat to Land Restitution efforts and illustrates a corruption of the law's original intent.





“We have explained how these policies are affecting our communities and how nothing’s being done. We’ve repeated our stories so many times that we’re almost out of words. But we still said to ourselves, ‘How wonderful that Witness for Peace is coming. We must go and tell our stories.’ So I hope you take this back to the United States with you, so that people know how fumigations are destroying our food sources and ways of life.”

**-PCN Community Representative**



# FUMIGATIONS

The fumigation program has not succeeded in significantly reducing coca cultivation. Before the fumigation program was started, there were 160,000 hectares of coca in Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru. There are now 150,000 hectares of coca in those countries. Besides being ineffective, the fumigation strategy is a costly one. Since 1996 the U.S. has spent almost \$4.2 billion dollars in Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement programs.

Fumigation specifically costs about three million pesos (USD \$1,682) per hectare of coca. For comparison's sake, alternative development programs generally cost between \$7 and \$141 USD per hectare of coca cultivation, making them much more cost-effective. Furthermore, one of the great ironies of aerial spraying is that coca is one of the crops least susceptible to fumigation; coca is resilient and can grow back in as little as one month. However, fumigation renders the land unusable for five to ten years for most food crops, making the people more dependent on coca.

Finally, the delegation heard numerous concerns that the fumigation program is targeting small-scale farms and ignoring large scale operations. The group heard of 10 fumigations of one village in January and February of 2011, even after the community had submitted proposals for a voluntary eradication program. The delegates also heard concerns that fumigation causes the displacement of indigenous, Afro-descendant, and campesino groups.

## **Impact on the Environment**

Colombia is home to a "mega-diverse" ecosystem, hosting about 14 percent of the world's biodiversity. Aerial fumigation has resulted in the destruction of fragile ecosystems. After fumigation, the land does not recover for many years. Often the only crop that will grow during that time period is coca because it is extremely hardy. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime reported that 158,000 hectares of virgin rainforest in Colombia were fumigated between 2001 and 2007 due to coca eradication efforts.

In addition, people, animals and land are devastated by the toxic air, and homes are damaged. Waste from cocaine production and the fumigation process pollute the rivers and water sources. The destruction of food crops affects not only food security for humans who rely on agricultural crops, but also the animals inhabiting the affected ecosystem, who must find new sources of food when their usual sources are fumigated.

## Health Consequences

In addition to the dietary health consequences of destroying the nutrition base of small-scale farmers, there are numerous other health consequences that we heard of associated with the aerial spraying and contamination of soil and water resources.

Despite assurances from the U.S. Department of State that fumigations do not occur when people or livestock are present, the delegates heard over and over from communities that they receive no warning before fumigations. Fumigations severely compromise food security, and reports of direct health problems such as respiratory difficulty, skin rashes, diarrhea, eye problems, and miscarriages have also been reported following spraying.

In 2007, the U.N.'s special rapporteur on the right to health stated: "There is credible, reliable evidence that the aerial spraying of glyphosate along the Colombia-Ecuador border damages the physical health of people living in [the affected areas]."

There is also credible, reliable evidence that the aerial spraying damages their mental health. Military helicopters sometimes accompany the aerial spraying and the entire experience can be terrifying, especially for children." Yet the fumigations continue as often as ten times a year in some areas.

## Manual Eradication

Aerial fumigation remains approximately three times more common than manual eradication. In meetings with campesino and other organizations, the delegation heard about numerous problems with manual eradication, including heightened militarization of territories and security risks when manual eradicators enter a community and turn civilians into military targets of illegal armed actors. Manual eradication consists of a direct confrontation between anti-narcotics authorities and civilians.

The delegation heard reports of armed forces stealing money, electronics and jewelry during forced manual eradication visits, and one community reported that an eradication team burned down a house. These confrontations also present opportunities for violence against campesinos, especially women, many of whom report sexual assaults during forced eradication campaigns. Further militarization has not contributed to a sense of safety or health in affected communities, as armed actors are often the perpetrators of violence and threats.

Furthermore we learned that manual eradication is being carried out during the summer months when communities are particularly vulnerable because little else will grow in the dry climate other than coca now that so much of the water in Cauca—the province where four of Colombia's main rivers are born—is being siphoned off to irrigate sugarcane plantations and other monoculture crops for export to the United States and other countries.

The delegation also heard reports of licit crops being uprooted to increase the number of hectares “manually eradicated”, and that requests for voluntary manual eradication and community-led alternative development proposals were routinely denied.

There are also concerns regarding the effectiveness of manual eradication efforts. Unlike community-led programs of voluntary eradication such as the one that led the Rescate-Las Varas Community Council in Tumaco to voluntarily eradicate 880 of the 900 hectares of coca formerly being cultivated in this autonomous Afro-Colombian territory, 34% of the areas manually eradicated in 2011 were simply replanted with coca. Manual eradication, like aerial fumigation, has not reduced the supply of cocaine.

**“People at the consumer end and at the production end are suffering and dying from narcotic drugs. The current policies have not worked for either group. It is people in the middle who profit, and current policies help them continue to profit.”**

## **Substitution**

Alternative development programs offering substitutes for coca cultivation have been poorly funded and inadequately implemented. While \$1.2 billion was invested between 2000 and 2005 in fumigations, only \$213 million was invested in substitution and alternative programs. The delegation heard numerous reports that the government has not lived up to promises made to campesino groups and communities regarding substitution programs.

Despite submitting their own voluntary eradication and alternative proposals, they were ignored and denied any financial or infrastructural support. Perhaps even more disturbingly, participation in alternative development programs has been undermined when licit crops planted as part of substitution programs have been promptly fumigated. There are documented cases of USAID-supported development projects getting fumigated by U.S.-funded planes, which, besides demonstrating a lack of communication and generally incoherent strategy, is an incredible waste of resources and U.S.-taxpayer dollars.

The delegation also heard that substitution programs and a lack of support for their implementation have failed to address the highly favorable market conditions for coca. For example, campesinos from Cauca reported that it costs 60,000 pesos in initial investment to grow 125 kilos of corn, which then sells for less than 60,000 pesos. In contrast, cultivating only 12 kilos of coca costs 20,000 pesos in initial investment, is less labor intensive, and results in 50,000 pesos profit. If the goal is to incentivize licit crop production, substitution programs must represent a viable economic alternative to coca.

Some campesinos reported that they cannot even participate in the substitution programs because they do not own land and because landowners often will only lease land for coca production (likely because, as noted above, it is the only viable cash crop).

In addition to promoting substitution programs that often don't offer a viable path to profit in the market, most are also focused on export-oriented crops that don't contribute to a family's ability to subsist off its land, much less for a community to ensure its food security.

Food security is additionally threatened by programs that offer financial incentives to eradicate coca cultivations, because the programs have not been consulted with those intended to receive the aid, and because the money is earmarked for different sources. For example, of the 2.500.000 COP currently being offered to small-scale farmers in Cauca to eradicate their coca crop, 500.000 is given in the form of food stamps that have to be spent at specific supermarkets, and there is concern that this fosters dependence on food sourcing from outside the community and thus places food sovereignty at risk.



"Aerial fumigations didn't reduce coca cultivation in Colombia. There are still large-scale coca cultivations in the eastern part of the country that are relatively untouched, though you should also know that fumigations actually served to concentrate cocaine production on the Pacific coast. There drug traffickers have their coca, their chemicals for processing, their weapons, their vehicles, and their shipping routes all in one place because of the ports. What's more, high poverty and unemployment on the Pacific Coast provides drug traffickers with the labor force they need for production. So all the phases of production are integrated, and they have much easier access to the U.S. market."

**-CIMA representative**

## MILITARIZATION AND ARMED CONFLICT

In response to the conflict over land, natural resources, political interests and the drug trade, the Colombian armed forces have grown **600** percent over the last **12** years, from **80,000** active duty members in 2000, to **490,000** in 2012. United States military aid and training enabled much of this growth, and Colombia is now one of the top recipients of U.S. military support in the world and the largest recipient in the Western hemisphere.

Brazil is a much larger country with a population of approximately **200** million, but Colombia, with **46** million people, has a much larger military due to U.S. investment. This militarization does not contribute to fostering a civil society that values democracy, as indicated by a troubling history of human rights violations by the state armed forces, either by direct involvement or collaboration with illegal paramilitary groups.

Colombia's official government statistics lists over **51,000** disappeared persons, and many believe the number is much higher than that. Plan Colombia funding has also been tied to anti-insurgency campaigns that mark success through body counts, which lead to the phenomenon of false positives—innocent people killed, re-clothed, and inaccurately counted among “**the enemy**” killed. The delegation heard many first person accounts of this deadly phenomenon from grieving family members.

More worrisome is that collusion between state armed forces, powerful economic interests and illegal paramilitary groups is not a thing of the past. Though paramilitary groups were outlawed in 1989 and declared fully demobilized in 2005, stories from many of the communities the delegation visited paint a different picture. In areas like the Macizo region of Cauca, Buenaventura and the Pacific Coast, to name just a few examples, paramilitaries have ceased to exist in name only.

Many of the same actors and weapons now comprise “**bandas criminales**” or criminal bands, that carry out the same intimidation, assassinations, torture, land grabs and violence against women that paramilitary groups did. For the purposes of this document, the delegation will continue to use the language of our partner organizations by referring to these groups as paramilitaries.

Heightened militarization has not been matched with heightened accountability for acts of violence committed by members of the U.S.-financed Colombian armed forces. In 2005, Jhonny Silva Avenguren--a 22-year-old chemistry student at the Universidad del Valle in Cali--was killed by police on his university campus at a nonviolent protest against free trade policies.

Even though Jhonny's parents know who killed him, neither the courts nor any other branch of the Colombian government has taken action on his case. In fact, Johnny's father, Wilman Silva, was threatened by a local district attorney and told that he personally would ensure that Wilman be imprisoned if he tried to bring a case against the police. Four years ago the Silva family filed a case with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, and to date they have received no further information on their case--along with many other families whose cases are backlogged in pending status.

**"There is nothing that will bring my son back. The pain of a parent losing a child is indescribable...I had so many plans for him. I raised him, walked with him, dreamed with him--and now he's gone forever. I will carry that pain with me for the rest of my life. It is my cross to bear. All I can do is share my story, so that people remember what happens in our country and that we may work to ensure that it never happens again to anyone."**

We heard heart-wrenching stories of women who have been brutalized by the conflict. Not only are they often left as widows and grieving mothers, but the instances of rape are overwhelming. The delegation heard from a leader of the Ruta Pacífica de Mujeres, who accompanies women survivors of physical and sexual violence, that in a 15-year period in one of the northern regions of Cauca, almost all adult females in the district had been raped by paramilitary, military, or guerilla personnel as part of the pattern of intimidation and humiliation. Women were used as the access point for physical territorial control, as "the first territory violated in the drug war." Drug policies that foster social polarization and militarization appear to escalate systematic violence against women.

Under the current consolidation model, regions such as Northern Cauca are facing tremendous increases in the militarization of their territory. There are over **16,000** members of the armed forces operating in just the northern part of Cauca alone, which represents a dramatic impact on the social and cultural life of the communities, the local economy, the environment, and local institutions. While the territory and daily lives are militarized, civilian deaths continue due to landmines and being caught in the crossfire between the insurgency and the military.

Due to the weaknesses in the strategy and the inability to rid the territory of guerilla presence, the army has increasingly resorted to indiscriminate bombings which destroy civilian property. Homes are destroyed, food crops ruined, and animals killed.

To all of this must be added the false accusations and prosecutions against the leaders of organizational processes in Consolidation Zones, such as the recent detainment of the coordinator of the Indigenous Guard in Northern Cauca, Manuel Antonio Pequí, on January 4th, 2013. Pequí was detained and falsely accused of rebellion and terrorism. There is grounded concern that the government is targeting leaders of the indigenous community who engaged in un-armed acts of territorial protection, such as what happened at Cerro Berlin, and is accusing them of acts of terrorism to throw them in jail.

There is worry that what happened to Manuel, an integral member of the Justice and Harmony Committee of the ACIN, will happen to dozens of others who, due to their commitment to their community and territory, will be falsely labeled a terrorist and incarcerated.

**“The Consolidation Plan was constructed and applied without considering the territorial and governance processes of our peoples who inhabit these ancestral lands, nor the community systems that we have built for our spiritual, physical, social and economic lives under the principles of reciprocity and gratuity. The Consolidation Plan is part of an international model currently undergoing an economic, food, energy, climate and values system crisis, the result of which is death.”**

### **Loss of Land**

Land is at the heart of the Colombian conflict, and the struggle between different powerful interests and armed groups for control of these natural resources displaces entire communities. According to National University Professor Daniel Libreros, nearly 4,000,000 campesinos have been displaced and collectively lost 7,000,000 hectares of land due to this Drug War.

This is in addition to the extensive displacement of indigenous people and Afro-descendant communities. The delegation was informed that there were 500 families displaced in the Bajamar, Buenaventura community in the month of October 2012 alone. Colombia has now surpassed the Sudan to become the country with the largest internally displaced population in the world. Many partners spoke of the conflict itself as a strategy to ensure continued displacement, rather than the traditional conceptualization of displacement as an effect of the conflict. Indeed, members of civil society are directly targeted, labeled variously as cocaine producers or insurgents, in order to remove them from their land and thus gain access to the natural resources it holds.

For example, campesino, Afro and indigenous people have been removed from their land as part of the policies to suppress coca. More than three and a half million people have been displaced within the Colombian population of approximately 46 million, and some sources place that number at closer to five and a half million.



The suffering the delegates witnessed and heard was palpable, and U.S. drug policies were a major cause of the problem. Many indigenous, Afro-Colombian and campesino communities have been on the same land for generations. This land is a part of their history and there is a deep symbolic and even visceral connection to that geographical location.

Geographers often call this topophilia—a deep love of a piece of topography, such that the story of their people is imbedded in the land. Being removed from that land has deep implications for their sense of safety and well-being. More practically, land is the source of their food, income and very survival. The systematic displacement of rural communities forces refugee flight and a pattern of rural-to-urban migration of a vulnerable and traumatized populace, who face social isolation and urban poverty when they settle in large cities like Cali and Bogotá.

Discrimination, unemployment, poverty, gangs and substance abuse were just a few of the challenges mentioned by the Nasa refugee community the delegation visited in Alta Buena Vista, Cali. The community there spoke of how Alta Buena Vista lacked basic infrastructure like roads, schools and potable water. The few jobs available in the city—men often work in construction and women as domestic help—are low-paying, unstable and often exploitative. Furthermore, people unfamiliar with urban social institutions often struggle not only to find the money to pay their bills, but to conceptualize how to pay bills altogether.

**“We say that people are not being displaced because of war; rather the logic is the opposite: a scenario of war is being created to displace people from their land.”**

## **Ethnocide**

Besides the killing of people (genocide), the drug war and suppression of coca contributes to ethnocide—the killing of a culture. For many indigenous peoples—such as the Nasa, the Quichuas, and the Misac—coca is sacred. It is sacred because (1) it has amazing healing properties when used properly, (2) it is hearty and will grow in the dry season and will survive environmental destruction caused by fumigation, (3) it is an incredibly nutritious and useful plant, and (4) it is a profound symbol of connectedness to Mother Earth. The sacredness of coca for indigenous peoples is very similar to the sacredness of corn for the Hopi or the Zuni in Arizona and New Mexico. Neither of these indigenous U.S. cultures could survive as a culture if they were denied the right to grow corn, and corn is part of their connection to Mother Earth in that context. The latent or unintended consequence of U.S.-Colombian drug policy is FORCED assimilation and intolerance of cultural diversity.

There are over 200 products that come from coca, including medicines, drinks, cookies and breads, skin creams, sauces, and other products. The delegates were served and consumed several such products, and they had no narcotic or hallucinogenic consequences at all. Indeed, the process used by indigenous peoples involves a toasting of the coca leaves in the sun.

The solar drying process affects the chemistry of the coca leaves, and it is impossible to use these toasted leaves to make cocaine. The sun removes the alkaloids that are central to cocaine production. As Juan (a pseudonym) told us, “Coca is not intrinsically the problem. The problem is how it is processed.” Another spokesman of the Nasa people said, “Because coca is the only product that will survive glyphosate fumigations, it is an essential food product. In fact, we would like to create markets for the highly constructive uses of this very useful and potentially life-giving plant.”

Coca has remarkable uses as a medicine. For mountain people, the blood thinning qualities of the coca leaf are critical to processing oxygen when engaging in heavy labor at high elevations. It also has analgesic properties that are beneficial for pain relief and in circumstances of heavy manual labor.

Coca has sacred connotations for many indigenous groups, for whom it is part of their world vision and used in almost all rituals and medicines. It characterizes the interaction between the physical and spiritual. It is the medium by which they communicate with the spiritual, and it is not used as a hallucinogen. A complete destruction of this symbol entails a significant undermining of these cultures.

Furthermore, we heard from numerous campesino communities that the coca leaf is also deeply interwoven with their cultural and dietary traditions. Without the 25 coca plants per family allotted to indigenous communities, campesinos and other ethnic communities are being denied the right to their cultural heritage.

### **Corruption Across Many Sectors of Society**

It is clear from talking to more than 70 informants that the high stakes involved in controlling and ensuring the flow of drugs has created massive fraud at many levels. When the demand side of the equation is ignored and allowed to remain extremely high and supply is high risk, the incentives for involvement are enormous. Thus, corruption at many levels in government, military, and the private sector for participating and earning a piece of the reward is substantial. Political ideologies have blurred as different factions collude to share drug profits; there are even reports of FARC rebels collaborating with paramilitaries, two groups that were historically at odds with each other but have been brought together by drug money.

**“There is widespread recognition among Colombians that current policies [to control drugs] do not work –they are failed approaches. Former Presidents of American states are now also recognizing that the policies of the past several decades have failed.”**

## CONCLUSIONS

If the war on drugs was succeeding and supply was being reduced, there should be fewer drugs on the market, at a much higher cost. However, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, consumption of cocaine increased by 27% between 1998 and 2008. Accordingly, the delegation agrees with the Global Commission on Drug Policy: “The global war on drugs has failed, with devastating consequences for individuals and societies around the world.”

While the current approach has clearly failed, the delegates heard numerous suggestions and alternative proposals from the groups and individuals with whom they met. The suggestions came in many forms but focused on ending the War on Drugs, ending the militarization of Colombia, dealing with displacement and loss of land, and investing in infrastructure development (roads, schools, health care, access to water, etc.). Many groups also asked that the Colombian and U.S. governments involve campesinos, indigenous groups, Afro-Colombian groups, labor organizations, and other community organizations in the decision-making processes. Many of these proposals were also included in the Report of the Global Commission on Drug Policy in June 2011.

### **We call on the United States government to:**

- Pursue an open debate on drug policy that involves campesinos, indigenous groups, Afro-Colombian groups, labor organizations, and other community organizations.
- Explore policies that place more emphasis on preventing and reducing demand for illicit drugs, as well as addiction treatment, rather than investing almost all resources on reducing supply.
- Consider the Bolivian model, which allows for small-scale production of coca, focuses on voluntary manual eradication, and has reduced coca cultivation by 12%.
- Replace the criminalization and punishment of people who use drugs with the offer of health and treatment services to those who need them.
- Encourage experimentation with models of legal regulation of drugs that are designed to undermine the power of organized crime and safeguard the health and security of citizens.

**In the specific case of Colombia, the delegation recommends that the United States government:**

- Immediately end all military assistance to Colombia.
- End aerial fumigation of coca crops and focus on voluntary manual eradication.
- Allow small-scale production of coca by indigenous, campesino, and Afro-descendant communities for medicinal and spiritual purposes.
- Ensure that any substitution programs are gradual, voluntary, and focus on viable cash crops that can generate income as well as food.
- Recognize the cultural, dietary, and medicinal importance of coca products and work towards creating markets that allow for the licit transformation of this product to be sold.
- Continue supporting and expanding community-led development programs such as Sí Se Puede (Yes We Can) that don't require "zero coca" as a precondition for social investment, and which are initiated and carried out with direct community oversight and evaluation of all programs, and without the visible presence of the Armed Forces or any fumigations in the area. This includes support of the Regional Program for Voluntary Alternative Development (Programa Regional de Desarrollo Alternativo Concertado) currently being promoted by communities in Cauca. The Rescate-Las Varas Community Council voluntarily eradicated 880 of the 900 hectares of coca formerly being cultivated in this autonomous Afro-Colombian territory through this model, showing what can be accomplished through bottom-up, grassroots efforts that value community processes and which offer a sustainable path towards peace and stability in the territories.

**In addition, the delegation recommends that the U.S. government encourage the Colombian government to take the following actions:**

- Ensure that individual port workers are not sanctioned for the content of shipping containers; the narcotics police should be responsible for enforcement of drug laws.
- Repeal any laws that result in loss of land used to grow coca. Any acts of land seizure must consider the scale of the production as well as the control of the owner over the property, especially given the continuing presence of armed actors in rural areas.
- Stop militarization and paramilitarization of indigenous, campesino, and Afro-descendant lands.
- Follow court orders 02, 05, 06, and others requiring support for women, indigenous groups, and Afro-Colombian populations.
- Encourage and assist in the creation of eco-cities that simulate rural living conditions.



These proposals are not intended to be exhaustive but to provide a starting point for a discussion that shifts from a focus on militarization and reduction of supply to a focus on drug use as a health issue and protection of citizens of both Colombia and the United States. The delegates believe that the current approach has been costly in human, monetary, and environmental terms for decades and that it is far past time for a new approach. We cannot afford for this issue to remain unchanged for another 25 years.