



AQUÍVIVE LA DEMOCRACIA

INTERIM COMMISSION ABOUT DRUG POLICY SENATE OF THE REPUBLIC OF COLOMBIA

April 2021

The Honorable Kamala Harris
Vice-President of the United States
President of the United States Senate
Washington, DC 20500

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
President Pro Tempore
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Vice President and Members of Congress:

Making use of our Constitutional functions as Congressmen of Colombia, and as part of the Interim Commission on Drug Policy, we have found it pertinent to send you this document, reiterating the evidence on the low effectiveness that glyphosate fumigation has had in combating illicit crops and drug trafficking, after almost 40 years of applying this strategy. This, on the occasion of Decree 380 of 2021 issued yesterday by the Colombian government, looking to restart aerial spraying with this herbicide.

Through this technical document we want to record our rejection of the use of glyphosate, due to its ineffectiveness, and its enormous economic, social and ecological costs for both Colombia and the United States.

Additionally, we offer a brief overview of the current status of the implementation of the National Comprehensive Substitution of Crops for Illicit Use (NCSC), which is part of point 4 of the Peace Agreement and whose purpose is to provide a definitive solution to the illicit drug problem. Crop substitution has proven to be an effective strategy to combat illicit crops, but it is currently underfunded.

Without a doubt, drug trafficking is one of the main threats to the security of Latin America and the United States. Drug trafficking and its related activities pose a risk to people's physical integrity, social stability, the state monopoly on the use of force, public order, democracy and even the environment. Finding effective solutions to this phenomenon is a priority for the entire international community.

For this reason, we call on Congress and the President of the United States for this document to be considered and taken into account in foreign policy decisions in Latin America, with regard to the fight against drug trafficking. We are in favor of the implementation of a cost-effective drug policy that is based on evidence and that will reduce the amount of lives lost, due to drug use and its collateral effects.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Colombia has been a leading nation in forced eradication policies. In fact, it is the only country in the world that has allowed aerial spraying with glyphosate as a strategy to combat illicit crops. The United States government has sponsored fumigation programs in Colombia from the 1990s until 2015, after which Plan Colombia ended (2000-2015).¹

Between 2000 and 2015, 1,678,426 hectares of coca were fumigated², which required an investment of almost \$133 billion dollars³. The underlying question is whether this billion-dollar investment by the governments of the United States and Colombia has been effective in combating the public health and safety problem posed by drug trafficking.

Plan Colombia, despite having had an investment of 140 billion dollars,⁴ demonstrated that glyphosate was not effective in reducing supply or demand for illicit crops and substances, at least in the long term. The evidence showed that:

- The use of glyphosate only managed to reduce illicit crops for two years.
- Starting in 2004, illicit crops increased again.
- Between 1999 and 2006 the number of Colombian departments with coca increased from 12 to 23, that is, almost 100%. Between 2000 and 2006, which were the years when more hectares were fumigated with glyphosate, there was an increase in illicit crops in 11 departments.

Glyphosate has not only been a failed strategy within the anti-drug and security policy, but it has also had very negative collateral effects, among which we highlight deforestation in ecosystems of great global importance such as the Amazon.

On the other hand, crop substitution has been a proven strategy with effectiveness rates above 90%. Unfortunately, the Comprehensive National Program for the Substitution of Crops for Illicit Use (NCSC), which is part of the Peace Agreement signed by the Colombian government in 2016, is under-funded and has a high non-compliance rate.

Therefore, given the undeniable reality confirmed by the above statistics, we ask the United States Congress not to support the resumption of glyphosate spraying as a mechanism to combat illicit crops in Colombia and, on the contrary, to support the implementation of point 4 of the Peace Agreement, which the government Colombian has left underfunded.

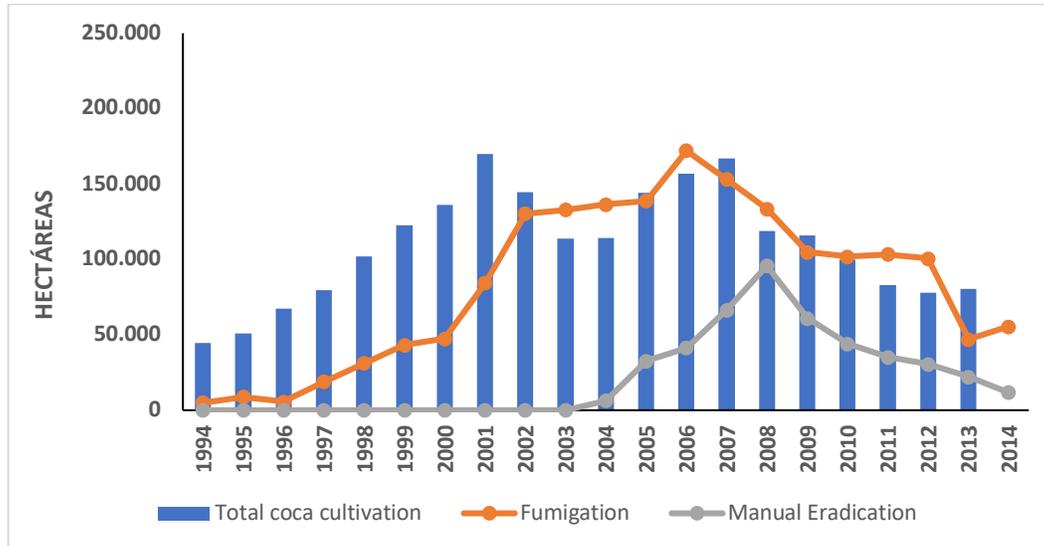
¹ In 2015, President Juan Manuel Santos gave the order to suspend them, after the World Health Organization (WHO) announced that glyphosate is “probably carcinogenic to humans.”

² US Department of State. In: <https://www.state.gov/international-narcotics-control-strategy-reports/>

³ Although there is a discrepancy in the exact value of the spraying cost per hectare. This figure was prepared based on: the number of hectares fumigated reported in the reports of the US State Department and a World Bank study on the cost of fumigations that establishes that the cost of fumigating one hectare is of 79,200 dollars. Ver: Mejía, Restrepo y Roza, (2015), *On The effects of enforcement on illegal markets*. World Bank.

⁴ National Planning Department, (2016), Plan Colombia: Balance of 15 years. Bogotá.

PLAN COLOMBIA: EXPERIENCE WITH GLYPHOSATE



Source: Self elaboration. Data: US State Department. In: Isacson, (2015), *Even if glyphosate were safe, fumigation in Colombia would be a bad policy. Here's why*, WOLA.

2000-2003: Crop Reduction

Between 2000 and 2003, 394,803 hectares of coca crops were fumigated. Although between 2000 and 2001 there was an increase of 33,600 hectares, by 2003 the total number of coca crops had decreased by 16.4%, from 136,200 hectares to 113,850 hectares⁵. However, this success of the fumigations during the first years of Plan Colombia was very short-lived.

2004-2007: Increase and Atomization of Crops

Glyphosate fumigation is no longer an effective mechanism to curb illicit crops. Although the volume of fumigations increased, coca crops began to increase as well.

Between 2000 and 2007, 995,288 hectares of coca were fumigated with glyphosate, but the cultivation of this plant grew from 136,200 to 167,000 hectares, which represents an increase of 22.6%.

In 2006, the Colombian government sprayed a record 172,000 hectares (33,250 more than in 2005). However, crops grew 13,000 more hectares that year in comparison with 2005. For 2007, the United States Department of State reported practically the same amount of coca crops that it had reported in 2001 (169,800 hectares), when Plan Colombia was just beginning.

⁵ It is important to clarify that one hectare of coca can be fumigated several times in a year. Therefore, some years, the total estimated number of hectares of coca eradicated may exceed the total number of hectares of cultivated coca.

The use of glyphosate had an unwanted consequence known as the “balloon effect, which refers to the transfer of coca crops to other territories due to fumigation. Between 1999 and 2006 the number of Colombian departments with coca increased from 12 to 23, or almost 100%. Between 2000 and 2006, when more hectares were fumigated with glyphosate, there was an increase in illicit crops in 11 departments: Amazonas, Antioquia, Arauca, Boyacá, Chocó, Córdoba, Cundinamarca, Magdalena, Nariño, Valle del Cauca and Vichada. During the same period, the area dedicated to coca cultivation also increased in Peru (+8%) and Bolivia (+18%).

An example of the balloon effect is the following: at the beginning of Plan Colombia, Putumayo had 58,297 hectares of coca and Nariño had 3,959. By 2006, the hectares of coca in Putumayo had been reduced to 12,254 (79%), while in Nariño they increased to 15,606, which means an increase of 294%.

2008-2013: Increase in Manual Eradication and Decrease in Illicit Crops

In 2008, coca crops began to decline dramatically. Between 2007 and 2008, crops decreased by 48,000 hectares, equivalent to 29%. Between 2007 and 2013, the hectares of coca went from 167,000 to 85,000. That is, a reduction of 49%.

This decrease in coca cultivation occurred parallel with the progressive decrease in spraying with glyphosate, the increase in manual eradication and the implementation of alternative development projects.

Between 2007 (second highest year in coca crops during Plan Colombia) and 2013 (second lowest year in coca crops during the same period), glyphosate spraying decreased by 69.3%, which indicates that the use of this herbicide did not translate into a sustained decrease in illicit crops.

COCA CROPS VS. COCAINE PRODUCTION

The success achieved in reducing coca cultivation has not exactly translated into a decrease in cocaine production and consumption.

Drug traffickers have implemented novel techniques and methods to grow coca leaves, improving crop yields, so each hectare becomes more productive and cocaine production has remained stable or even increased in years where crops have decreased.⁶ Here is an example of this situation:

Table 1: Relationship Between Coca Crops, Coca Leaf Yield and Cocaine Production

Year	Number of Hectares	Coca Leaf Yield Per Hectare (metric tons)	Potential Production of Cocaine Hydrochloride Per Hectare
2018	171,000 ha	5.6 mt	6.3 kg
2019	169,000 ha	5.7 mt	6.5 kg
2020	154,000 ha	5.8 mt	6.7 kg

Source: High Council for Stabilization (“Alta Consejería Para la Estabilización”)

The coca market in Colombia is larger than the multi-billion-dollar aerial spraying efforts –even in the most generous years of US cooperation. While Plan Colombia cost \$ 141 billion dollars during its 15 years, it

⁶ UNODC, (2018, 2019, 2020), Colombia: monitoring of territories affected by illicit crops.

was estimated that the illegal coca market for 2018 alone reached \$ 50.4 billion dollars.⁷ At a time when the recovery from the COVID crisis is pushing budgets to the limit, forcing Colombia to resume spraying coca crops is a multi-billion-dollar waste of resources, dedicated to a measure that has proved inefficient in the face of the great economic muscle that this illegal market has in our country and in the world. The best way to cut the profits of drug traffickers is taking away from them the peasant labor they need to maintain their business.

CROP SUBSTITUTION: AN EFFECTIVE STRATEGY

The fourth chapter of the Peace Agreement signed by Colombia and the former FARC guerrilla is titled *Definitive Solution to the Illicit Drug Problem*. In this chapter, the Colombian State committed to develop and implement a crop substitution program. In compliance with this constitutional mandate, in 2017, the Comprehensive National Program for the Substitution of Crops for Illicit Use (NCSC) was created as a mechanism to solve the problem of drug trafficking.

The most recent evaluations and measurements carried out by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) confirm the effectiveness of this substitution program in combating illicit crops. According to UNODC Report No. 16 on the NCSC, the replanting of coca crops is only 0.6% when voluntary eradication is carried out by the communities and crop substitution processes are implemented. On the other hand, replanting rate is 35% when forced eradication is carried out by the Public Force.

Despite the high levels of effectiveness demonstrated by NCSC, this program is highly underfunded. The current government has allocated insufficient resources to those required to meet replacement goals. The following table presents the comparison of the resources that the High Council for Stabilization (in charge of executing the NCSC) requested from the Ministry of Finance, in order to meet the needs of the NCSC during the years 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021, versus the amount of resources actually allocated by that ministry.

As can be seen, in each of the four periods of time there is an important difference between the resources needed by the High Council for Stabilization and the resources assigned by the Ministry of Finance. This difference between required resources and allocated resources has grown exponentially over time. In 2018, 50.06% of the required budget was assigned; in 2019 it was 22.91%, 2020 was 2.95% and 2021 was 0%.

Table 2: Funds Requested vs Funds Assigned to NCSC 2018-2021 (Amounts are in approximate US dollars)

YEAR	2018	2019	2020	2021	TOTAL
Funds Requested	\$310.1 million	\$400.7 million	\$375.5 million	\$532.7 million	\$1,619 million
Funds Assigned	\$155.2 million	\$91.8 million	\$11.1 million	\$0	\$258.1 million
Allocation Percentage	50.06 %	22.91 %	2.95 %	0%	14.5%

Source: Colombia In Peace Fund (“Fondo Colombia en Paz”)
Percentages calculated before conversion to US dollars

On the other hand, by the end of 2020 only 1,792 families, out of a universe of 82,240 families, have a productive project in operation. In other words, only 2.2% of the families currently registered with the

⁷ Montenegro S., Llano J., Ibáñez D. 2019. Cocaine GDP 2005-2018: An Empirical Estimate. CEDE documents 44.

NCSC have a productive project that may allow them to abandon coca. This situation discourages coca growers from abandoning illicit crops.

Regarding the costs of the program, the budget per family registered with NCSC is approximately US \$10,000, which is divided into two years (see Table 3). In other words, in order to cover the totality of 1,792 families, less than \$18 million dollars would be needed, which is much less than the USD \$133 billion invested between 2000 and 2015 for glyphosate fumigation. Furthermore, crop substitution has had much more effective results.

Table 3: Costs for each family linked to NCSC

Period	Allocation / Family	Amount / Family	Year / Family Subtotal
Year 1	Work income for 12 months (COP \$2,000,000 bimonthly = Approx. USD \$560)	\$12.000.000 COP (Approx. USD \$3,340)	\$24.400.000 COP (Approx. USD \$6,800)
	Self Sustainability and Food Safety Incentive (1-time)	\$1.800.000 COP (Approx. USD \$500)	
	Quick Income Productive Project (1-time)	\$9.000.000 COP (Approx. USD \$2,500)	
	Technical Assistance	\$1.600.000 COP (Approx. USD \$440)	
Year 2	Long-term Productive Project (labor costs included)	\$10.000.000 COP	\$11.600.000 COP (Approx. USD \$3,200)
	Technical Assistance	\$1.600.000 COP (Approx. USD \$440)	
Total Allocated by NCSC Family			\$36.000.000 COP (Approx. USD \$10,000)

Fuente: Alta Consejería Para la Estabilización

The eradication of coca plantations in Colombia requires more social investment than chemical warfare. On March 9, the Secretary of State of the United States, Anthony J. Blinken, made a statement on the strategy to counteract illicit crops in Colombia, stating that “We have to help Colombians to create alternative livelihoods for people so they don’t get into this [coca cultivation]”. We agree with this statement. Since crop substitution has proven its effectiveness, we urge the Congress of the United States to support it politically and financially, in addition to monitoring the investment of the resources assigned for this purpose.

DEFORESTATION ASSOCIATED WITH GLYPHOSATE

Due to the control of crops, coca crops have been jumping from departments in the Pacific such as Nariño and Cauca to tropical forests in the Amazon and Catatumbo, which are biodiversity hotspots and mankind’s forest reservoirs. In Colombia, the following six nuclei of high deforestation were identified, which concentrated 38% of the total deforestation: the deforestation arc of the Northern Amazon (the most affected, with 23.1%), followed by the North Central Andes (8.3%), the Central Pacific (2.1%), the South Andes (2%), the North Andes (1.7%) and the South Pacific (1%).

The increase in deforestation and the growth of illegal economies are directly related activities. One of the main causes of deforestation is the colonization of forests for the establishment of illicit crops, mainly coca. To establish these crops, the first step is to clear the area through logging and later burn most of this native vegetation. Inevitably this generates a change in the vegetation cover and a loss of biomass and forest

density. If the lands are fumigated, they are later converted to pastures for extensive cattle ranching, which allows users to eventually claim the property titles.

It is very troubling that this situation has also reached special care zones. According to the most recent report from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2020), 28% of coca is found in forest reserve areas. According to figures from the Ministry of the Environment and Sustainable Development, between 2016 and 2017, deforestation caused by illicit crops increased by about 30%. In 2017, deforestation associated with coca crops in Colombia represented 24% of the total deforested in the country. In other words, due to coca crops, 137 hectares of natural Colombian forest are deforested daily, which is equivalent to 161 soccer fields with coca in strategic ecosystems.

Cordially,

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