



# **Asociación Interamericana para la Defensa del Ambiente**

*Interamerican Association for  
Environmental Defense*

*Associação Interamericana para a  
Defesa do Meio Ambiente*

*Association Interaméricaine pour  
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## **For Immediate Release**

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## **US CONGRESS CONDITIONS ANTI-NARCOTICS SPRAYING IN COLOMBIAN NATIONAL PARKS**

OAKLAND, CA, DECEMBER 10, 2003 — For the first time, the US Congress has officially acknowledged that US funds for the “Plan Colombia” drug eradication program may be used to spray coca and poppy crops located in Colombian national parks and other natural protected areas. However, the Congress conditioned funding for such spraying on compliance with Colombian law and a determination by the Department of State that “there are no effective alternatives to reduce drug cultivation in these areas.”

The decision is part of the 2004 appropriations bill for the Andean Counterdrug Initiative, a key element of the US “War on Drugs” in Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru. The authors of the bill that will be voted in January of 2004, agreed that while there is concern that coca growers are moving into Colombia’s national parks, aerial fumigation in the parks and reserves should be used only as a last resort. Instead, Congress favors alternatives such as manual eradication, training and equipping the police to protect the parks, and relocating families that have moved into these areas.

“The policy of using aerial spraying to eradicate illicit crops poses significant threats to human health and the environment,” says Astrid Puentes, Legal Director for AIDA. She adds that “The conditions imposed by the US Congress are a step in the right direction, though to truly protect the environment in Colombia we must ensure that the eradication forces begin complying with Colombian laws and stop trying to weaken them.”

Each year, Congress has conditioned the State Department’s use of funds for the spraying program on actions intended to help protect human rights and the environment. As in previous years, the Congress required that in 2004 the State Department certify that: the use of these herbicides in Colombia does not pose unreasonable risks or adverse effects to humans or the environment; the eradication program complies with the Colombian Environmental Management Plan; and the governments investigate and fairly compensate meritorious complaints about health harms and the destruction of legal crops. For the first time, however, the Congress also referred to and conditioned the spraying of national parks and reserves.

### **Organizaciones Participantes:**

**Centro de Derecho Ambiental  
y de los Recursos Naturales**  
Costa Rica

**Centro de Derechos Humanos  
y Medio Ambiente**  
Argentina

**Centro Mexicano de Derecho  
Ambiental**  
México

**Earthjustice**  
Estados Unidos

**Fiscalía del Medio Ambiente**  
Chile

**Fundepúblico**  
Colombia

**Justicia para la Naturaleza**  
Costa Rica

**Sierra Legal Defence Fund**  
Canadá

**Sociedad Peruana de Derecho  
Ambiental**  
Perú

**[http://www.aida-  
americas.org/aida.php](http://www.aida-americas.org/aida.php)**

In 2001, Colombia's environmental authorities specifically excluded national parks and natural reserves from the regions that are subject to aerial herbicide spraying. Instead, they ordered that manual or mechanical means be used to destroy coca and poppy crops in these areas. The authorities also prohibited the spraying of significant buffer areas surrounding the parks to avoid harms from spray drift or accidental spraying. These special protections are in line with the Colombian Constitution and environmental laws that establish special protections for these environmentally sensitive areas.

Therefore, spraying in natural parks and natural reserves in Colombia is clearly illegal. Nevertheless, the Colombian National Anti-narcotics Agency that collaborates closely with the US Department of State has sprayed in Colombia's national parks. Moreover, in June 2003, the Colombian National Council on Narcotics attempted to legalize such spraying. This action is being contested in Colombian courts for violating the Constitution and other laws.

According to Anna Cederstav, a scientist with AIDA, "A policy that creates no viable economic alternatives for farmers simply perpetuates the cycle of farmers cutting forests to plant coca and the government spraying herbicides to destroy the fields. The US and Colombian governments should make a good-faith effort and give manual eradication and alternative development projects a chance to work, instead of relying on massive aerial spraying and military campaigns to destroy the crops." She adds that "As the US Congress has now recognized for the National Parks, spraying should be the last recourse, but unfortunately it is the only one that has been systematically implemented until now."

The extensive spraying of potent herbicides could have devastating environmental impacts in the National Parks of Colombia, one of the most biodiverse nations on the planet. Important regions of the Amazon basin, the Tropical Andes, and the Chocó coastal rainforest are all located in Colombia. These vital ecosystems are being destroyed not only by illicit drug cultivation, but now also by the eradication program.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT PLAN COLOMBIA:

1. AIDA resources: <http://www.aida-americas.org/aida.php?page=plancolombia>
2. Photos of the environmental damages: <http://www.usfumigation.org/>
3. Scientific critiques: <http://www.amazonalliance.org/scientific/scientific1.htm>