



Asociación Interamericana para la Defensa del Ambiente
Interamerican Association for Environmental Defense

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**REPORT HIGHLIGHTS NEED FOR ALTERNATIVES TO U.S.-BACKED AERIAL
SPRAYING IN COLOMBIA: Illegal coca production increases, social and environmental
impacts caused by chemical spraying**

BOGOTA D.C./OAKLAND, CA, August 22, 2006. Six years since the Aerial Spraying Program of Plan Colombia (PECIG) began, the program has failed to meet its goal of eliminating 50 percent of illicit crops in Colombia. The program has seen an investment of nearly US\$1.2 billion and has led to the spraying of more than four times the initial area of coca crops. Nevertheless, in 2005, both the United Nations and the U.S. government actually reported an *increase* in the area covered by illicit coca crops in Colombia. Additionally, despite legal prohibitions, the Colombian government started spraying in the Macarena National Park in early August. The inefficiency of the spraying program and the associated harmful environmental and social effects demonstrate the need for alternative solutions. The Interamerican Association for Environmental Defense (AIDA) has released a report analyzing and calling for significantly increased government support of such alternatives.

Read “*Alternative Development Strategies in Colombia: the Need to Move Beyond Illicit Crop Spraying*” online at: http://www.aida-americas.org/aida.php?page=plancolombia_alternativespr

“The lack of results from the spraying program indicates a need to reevaluate the program,” asserts Anna Cederstav, AIDA’s Program Director. “This new report shows that successful alternative development programs can produce concrete results, without the negative impacts that are currently caused by the spraying in Colombia.”

In addition to generating adverse environmental and social impacts, the spraying program has harmed alternative development projects underway in Colombia, many of which are funded by the governments of Germany, the United States, and the Netherlands, as well as the United Nations. In one case, fair trade organic coffee crops grown under the program Empresa Cooperativa del Sur del Cauca, COSURCA, a program funded by USAID and the United Nations Office on Drugs & Crime, were destroyed by spraying campaigns in May and June of last year. In addition, in 2004, 2005 and 2006, indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities in the Sierra Nevada, Nariño and Cauca reported that their territories were sprayed, without consultation of the community groups, as required by Colombian and international law.

The report compares the lack of results of the spraying program with the significant successes of participatory and sustainable alternative development projects that have been implemented, and calls for a re-evaluation of the current strategy to focus on voluntary manual eradication of the crops, and alternative projects that take into account the social and geographic conditions of the region. ECOFONDO, a Colombian coalition of more than 130 environmental NGOs, supports this recommendation. According to Rafael Colmenares, ECOFONDO’s Director, “there exist other successful programs to

eradicate illicit crops in Colombia that don't have as high economic, social, environmental and health costs as the spraying effort. It is these programs that should be backed, as they can bring real, lasting solutions to this problem.”

Alternative programs reviewed in the report include: the Sustainable Systems for Conservation (a project of the Colombian National Parks Unit); Participatory Environmental Management for Peace and Sustainable Development in Colombia (a program developed by ECOFONDO with support of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA); and voluntary eradication programs supported by the United Nations. Many other local, state-supported programs exist that are producing positive results as well. These programs, implemented at just a fraction of the cost of the spraying program, have benefited thousands of families and will continue to do so in the long run.

“We are convinced that the immediate implementation of alternative, sustainable and participatory programs – by the state and communities – can bring about real solutions to the complex problem of illicit crop cultivation in Colombia,” said Astrid Puentes, AIDA’s Legal Director. “Continuing spraying, such as that occurring in National Parks, while ignoring programs that deliver food and jobs to Colombia’s rural poor, will contribute to the deterioration of the humanitarian situation and lead to an intensification of the crisis in Colombia, resulting in severe environmental impacts and the waste of millions of U.S. tax dollars and Colombian funds on an ineffective program.”

Read the Executive Summary of the Report at:

http://www.aida-americas.org/templates/aida/uploads/docs/AIDA-EX_SUMM_ALT_DEVT_06-08.pdf

Read the complete version of the Report (Spanish Text) at:

http://www.aida-americas.org/templates/aida/uploads/docs/AIDA-INFORME_DESARROLLO_ALTERNATIVO_06-08.pdf

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