

Statement of Chairman Tom Davis
Hearing on "Andean Counterdrug Initiative"
Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human Resources
March 2, 2004

I want to commend my friend and colleague, Chairman Souder, for continuing to lead the fight against the scourge of narcoterrorism. The Andean Counterdrug Initiative (ACI) is an important component of U.S. foreign and drug policy. The U.S. government's support contributes to the progress being made in the Andean region to fight drug trafficking and international crime, and to improve economic and social conditions. I have led three congressional delegations to Colombia over the past year and I can say firsthand that our significant investment is beginning to pay dividends. Together with the strong commitment of the regional governments, historic levels of regional cooperation, and the U.S. government's counter-narcotic efforts, valuable progress has been made.

We are seeing tremendous results in illegal crop eradication, and ACI programs have produced record reductions in coca production and drug labs. Each week brings news of new seizures of cocaine and heroin—interdictions that are usually the result of U.S.-supplied intelligence. We are constantly hearing about more guerrillas and paramilitary surrendering their arms and leaving the narcoterrorism business. These people are beginning to realize the opportunity of a better life awaits them. Alternative development programs are being implemented in Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia so coca farmers can earn a legal livelihood. Although challenges from organized and violent coca producers exist, we are making progress.

Last July, Chairman Souder and I traveled to Colombia and saw firsthand the devastation that drug production and trafficking has on this country. We saw Colombian soldiers who have lost their limbs or eyesight or sustained permanent disabilities in their battle to return peace to their nation and keep drugs off American streets. We also visited a USAID sponsored facility for internally displaced people who have been forced from their homes by drug traffickers and guerillas. This facility showed me how our work on behalf of Colombia's millions of internally displaced people is offering men, women, and children a second chance at a violence-free, productive life. I look forward to today's testimony regarding the USAID program and other programs in the Andean region.

During my visits to Colombia, it was evident to me just how effective U.S. assistance is to their government. Colombia's ability to combat both drugs and terror has been strengthened due in large part to our support in the region as well as the will and determination of the Colombian people. With such promising results over the last three years, it is important to continue our support and sustain the momentum. Goals are being met, and new goals need to be set. Of course obstacles remain, and progress is slower than we would like it to be. But, in light of the strong progress being made in Colombia and the Andean region, I feel it is important to continue our government's support of ACI and help bring democratic security to the region. The Administration requested \$731 million for fiscal year 2005. I support this budget request and look forward to today's testimony regarding how these dollars will be allocated.