

Statement of

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“Plan Colombia”

Chairman Davis, Congressman Waxman and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today and your strong support for the work of the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) worldwide. Plan Colombia and the tireless commitment of President Uribe have provided critical support to DEA and Colombian National Police (CNP) investigations that have proven their success through the ultimate measure of results. While there is always more work to be done, the recent major indictments of the leadership of the Norte Valle Cartel and their protectors in the AUC terrorist organization, who together have exported in excess of \$10 billion worth of cocaine to the United States, are among the successes demonstrating that we are making a difference in Colombia. I look forward to discussing our efforts with you this afternoon.

Plan Colombia Facilitates Law Enforcement

Mr. Chairman, while Plan Colombia provides only limited direct support to the DEA, the program's impact in bolstering Colombian institutions and the rule of law has created a climate favorable to law enforcement activities and close partnerships with our counterparts in Colombia. Our efforts seek to disrupt and dismantle major Colombian international drug trafficking organizations and their financial operations at every step, from cultivation and production of cocaine and heroin to the streets of America. By doing so, we are also acting against narcoterrorist organizations such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and United Self-Defense Groups of Colombia (AUC), who are inextricably linked to the drug trade and have come to depend on drug-derived proceeds to finance their wars against the Government of Colombia.

The key element of Plan Colombia in this respect is the Justice Sector Reform Program, which has assisted the Colombian government to develop and sustain a modern, effective and efficient criminal justice system through training of police, prosecutors, and judges, support of asset forfeiture and financial investigations, along with other initiatives which have trained over 10,000 police, prosecutors, judges, and others. In addition to bolstering law enforcement institutions and infrastructure, the program has provided direct support for two DEA programs that have a special relationship to Plan Colombia.

Bilateral Case Initiative

The Bilateral Case Initiative supports investigations of the operations of drug trafficking and drug-related money laundering organizations outside the United States for prosecution inside the United States, sending a strong message to major traffickers worldwide that they cannot hide from prosecution. Under the program, the Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs Section of the Criminal Division of the Department of Justice, the Special Operations Division, the CNP, and the DEA's Bogota Country Office have gathered evidence overseas to build prosecutable cases in the United States leading to over 50 convictions. The majority of the indictments obtained have been against high level Colombian FARC, AUC and cartel members, including members of the Attorney General's Consolidated Priority Organization Target (CPOT) list. Plan Colombia provided support for detailing a second Justice Attaché to the Embassy, training and related equipment for Colombian prosecutors necessary travel and other related support.

Communications Interception Program

Another program, funded by \$5 million in Justice Sector Reform money, gives the CNP the ability to gather law enforcement intelligence by intercepting communications within Colombia with appropriate judicial authorization. Resulting leads and information are shared with DEA domestic offices through the Special Operations Division to pursue and expand investigations in the United States and play a critical role in investigating major drug trafficking, money laundering and precursor chemical organizations. Operation Encore began with wiretap intercepts relating to a major heroin trafficking organization in Pereira, Colombia, expanded to wiretaps in New York, and ultimately led to 31 arrests in the United States and Colombia and the dismantlement of the organization.

Law Enforcement Leadership and Programs

In addition to the programs supported by Plan Colombia, the DEA also has primary responsibility for all U.S. drug law enforcement matters in Colombia and carries out its own programs there to address key priorities.

The Committee expressed a specific interest in how the DEA works and coordinates with other counterdrug and law enforcement agencies from both the United States and Colombia. As an integral part of the Embassy country team under the authority of the U.S. Ambassador, we consult on most U.S. counterdrug programs and coordinate with the Department of State's Narcotics Affairs Section and other federal agencies. In addition, the DEA coordinates all drug investigations conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and Immigration and Customs Enforcement relating to Colombia or Colombian traffickers operating in the United States or third countries. We also attempt to pass appropriate information from the DEA's domestic investigations that relates to Colombia to those agencies and the CNP.

Over the course of several years, the Bogota Country Office has cultivated a strong working relationship with the CNP, other law enforcement agencies, and prosecutors, often assigning DEA Special Agents and Intelligence Analysts to work hand-in-hand with our Colombian counterparts in support of investigations. An important example of this cooperation is the Bogota Heroin Task Force, made up of 9 DEA personnel and approximately 40 CNP officers who target major organizations distributing significant quantities of heroin to the United States.

Before moving on to tell you about the many successes that have arisen from these programs, I would be remiss if I did not briefly mention a few of our other initiatives in Colombia that address areas of interest to the Committee. DEA's Sensitive Investigative Units (SIUs), made up of 161 Colombian law enforcement personnel trained, equipped, screened and guided by the DEA, take the lead in operations against CPOT and priority target organizations. In addition, we have established specialized financial investigation groups within both the SIU and the Bogota Country Office to carry out my vision of recommitting the DEA to hunt and remove the proceeds of the illicit drug trade – an especially important goal in Colombia given the well-established ties between drug trafficking and terrorism.

Finally, we are working to interdict the flow of drugs to the United States. Operation Firewall, developed by the Cartagena Resident Office, targets “go-fast” boats departing the North Coast of Colombia along with the CNP and the U.S. Southern Command and has come close to doubling cocaine seizures in the area over the past year. In Bogota and Cali, the DEA operates airport interdiction programs to screen passengers who may be drug couriers bound for the United States. In 2003, our efforts in Bogota led to the seizure of 426 kilograms of cocaine and 93 kilograms of heroin, an increase from the seizure of 376 kilograms of cocaine and 88 kilograms of heroin in 2002.

DEA Successes and Plan Colombia

Our strong cooperation with the Government of Colombia and the programs I just described have led to several major law enforcement successes related to Colombia even since I became Administrator last August. I would like to emphasize for the Committee that these have not just been successes for Colombia – they have been major successes for America because they have targeted organizations moving massive quantities of illicit drugs to our cities and towns. It has often been pointed out that violence, instability and terrorism in Colombia is fueled in significant part by American drug consumption – not only do our actions to prevent one prevent the other, they ultimately protect Americans from the consequences of drug abuse.

As Attorney General Ashcroft announced last month, our most significant recent success has been the indictment of nine leaders of the Norte Valle cartel, three of whom are CPOT targets. The cartel has been one of Colombia's most powerful drug trafficking organizations and exported more than 1.2 million pounds (or 500 metric tons) of cocaine to the United States between 1990 and the present, which we have estimated to be worth in excess of \$10 billion. Moreover, it used and paid the terrorist AUC to protect its drug routes, laboratories, members and associates. We believe that the Norte Valle cartel has been responsible for bringing a third to half of all the cocaine that reaches our shores into the United States. Our intention is for these indictments, obtained by the Department's Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs Section working together with several U.S. Attorney's Offices, to accomplish the most meaningful result of all and put them out of business like the Medellin and Cali cartels before them. The Sensitive Investigative Unit I mentioned made up of our partners in Colombian law enforcement seized \$200 million of the cartel's assets, contributed a significant amount of information to these indictments and continues to make every effort to apprehend the leaders of the cartel. I think it is fair to say that these results would have been a lot more difficult, if not impossible, without the direct and indirect support provided by Plan Colombia.

Our work with Colombian law enforcement has also led to two recent successful financial investigations. Operation White Dollar resulted in a coordinating dismantling of a massive international ring that laundered millions of Colombian drug dollars in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom through the “Black Market Peso Exchange,” which has been one of the primary methods by which Colombian traffickers launder their funds as well as one of the most difficult to detect. This Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) investigation was coordinated by the DEA and resulted in indictments against 34 members of the ring and the forfeiture of \$20 million in laundered funds. Another financial investigation, Operation Double Trouble, targeted and disrupted key Colombian drug and money brokers operating in both countries, resulting in the seizure of over \$12.8 million. The SIU and the programs I described helped to gather critical evidence for both of these investigations.

Other, similar, cases have grown from our work in Colombia, although time does not permit me to share their details this afternoon. I hope that these compelling examples will demonstrate for you, however, the significance, success, and meaningful impact of the work of the DEA in Colombia, which is one of the cornerstones to which many of our most significant enforcement efforts around the world can be traced. Our successes would be far less possible without the support and assistance provided by the United States in Colombia.

Conclusion

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate very much the opportunity to testify today and the bipartisan support the Committee has demonstrated for the DEA. I strongly encourage your continued support of our work in Colombia and would be glad to answer any questions.