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Before the House Committee on Government Reform
June 17, 2004
“Colombia: Delivering Good Counter-Drug Results”

Chairman Davis, Ranking Member Waxman, and distinguished members of the Government Reform Committee. I am honored to appear before you to report how we are achieving the President’s counter-drug objectives by reducing the production of cocaine and heroin in Colombia and the Andean region. Our progress has been due in great measure to the foresight of this Committee in its strong support for Andean counter-drug assistance.

For the first time in 20 years, thanks to the strength, dedication, and perseverance of our Colombia allies, we are on a path to realize dramatic reductions in cocaine production in Colombia, and a complementary reduction in the world’s total supply of cocaine. U.S. counterdrug assistance to Colombia has been forged into a plan for near-term success through the personal leadership and insights of Colombian President Uribe. President Uribe has attacked Colombia’s many problems simultaneously: dramatically expanding the areas governed by the rule-of-law, reducing human rights abuses, reducing violence, increasing economic growth and reducing unemployment while reducing coca cultivation and cocaine production, arresting thousands of criminal drug traffickers and extraditing their key leadership, and militarily engaging the AUC, FARC, and ELN in a battle they cannot win, causing the terrorists unsustainable mass desertions and personnel losses.

The integrated U.S. military, police, counterdrug, USAID, and intelligence support to Colombia has been the crucial enabler for these results, and will continue to be necessary at its current level. The challenge before us is to stay the course and ensure the success that is within sight.

Colombia will have a solid foundation for continued economic and social development in an environment based on democratic institutions and with the rule of law present throughout its territory. We anticipate a substantially disrupted cocaine production capacity, with coca cultivation reduced to about one-half its peak level of three years ago, and with the Colombian government capable of taking on an increasingly independent role in sustaining illicit coca cultivation at this new low level.

In order to ensure long-term success, the Government of Colombia will have to be persistent and attentive to the threat even as it is diminishing. Cocaine traffickers will be able to rapidly reconstitute mass-cultivation of coca if a substantial eradication program is not maintained. Essential complements to the success in Colombia are effective eradication and law enforcement programs in Peru and Bolivia. Cultivation in Peru and Bolivia has remained in check and need to stay that way to ensure no explosive growth of coca that can replace losses in Colombian cultivation. However, let me make it clear, our strategy is working. As the New York Times on June 9, 2004 reported, “the overall decline in coca in Colombia and the rest of the Andes is indisputable, and the strategy appears to have controlled the so-called balloon effect: the recurring

phenomenon that once saw huge fields of coca pop up in one region after being stamped out in another.”

The United States’ support is extremely broad, encompassing economic development, humanitarian assistance, and assistance in strengthening Colombia’s justice system in addition to the more visible U.S. programs that aid with drug crop eradication and illicit drug interdiction. The Departments of State, Defense, Justice, Homeland Security, Treasury and USAID have all made major contributions of expertise and experience. Our function in the Office of National Drug Control Policy has been to coordinate the multiple contributions and help focus on the counter-drug programs that make a strategic difference in destroying the capacity of drug traffickers to make their illicit product and sell it for a profit. We work with the interagency counter-drug partners through the mechanism of an International Drug Control Policy Planning Committee and through the budget and program guidance we provide to all the federal drug control agencies.

Market Disruption Approach

The National Drug Control Strategy applies a market model of illegal drug production to identify where the production chain is vulnerable to disruption. We focus anti-drug programs at those key points, whether agricultural production, financing, transportation, or a criminal command and control structure, where we can interfere with the sequence of events necessary for illegal drugs to reach our shores.

The key vulnerability of the cocaine industry is the cultivation phase, which is attacked through coca eradication in source countries such as Colombia. Other vulnerabilities include elements of the transportation network, which are attacked through interdiction, seizures, and arrests—such as those that in the past have been directed against smuggling via large fishing vessels in the Eastern Pacific. Another vulnerability is the major trafficking organizations and their communications and decision-making processes, which are attacked through arrests, extraditions, prosecutions, seizures, forfeitures, and revenue denial activities targeting major drug trafficking organizations. Dependent drug users are quite conscious of the price and purity of the drugs they consume, and our objective is to make drugs as expensive and impure as possible, as well as difficult and risky to obtain.

The budget request this year for supply reduction focuses on strengthening enforcement and interdiction efforts, maintaining strong support for coca and opium poppy eradication in Colombia, and providing resources for promising new approaches.

In 2003, Colombia sprayed about 127,000 hectares of coca and manually eradicated over 8,000 hectares, causing a net reduction of about 30,000 hectares, thereby, reducing Colombia coca cultivation from 144,000 hectares at the end of 2002 to 114,000 a year later. Pure cocaine production potential dropped over 21 percent from 585 metric tons in 2002 to 460 metric tons at the end of 2003. If, as planned in 2004, Colombia, with U.S. assistance, sprays 130,000 hectares, coca cultivation should drop to as little as 80,000 hectares by the end of this year. Colombia’s entire production will only be 323 metric tons of cocaine, a dramatic 54 percent reduction from Colombia’s production of 700 metric tons in 2001. When combined with no dramatic increase in Peruvian and Bolivian coca production, there will be substantial shortages of cocaine in the United

States, Europe, and Latin America. This reduction in cocaine supply will contribute substantially to achieving the Administration's goal of reducing U.S. cocaine consumption 25 percent by 2006. At this juncture, Colombian coca eradication is proceeding at a pace similar to 2003, a pace that will continue the substantial decline in overall cultivation and cocaine production.

The greatest potential impediments to Colombia's ability to continue eradication at the 130,000 hectare rate are unusually bad weather and/or the loss of spray capacity due to hostile fire. In that respect, Colombia is in a stronger position than it was last year. There are presently 16 spray aircraft in Colombia, with five more due to be delivered by the end of this year. This compares with an average presence of 16 spray aircraft in 2003. More platforms increase fumigation flexibility by offering more options for spraying in different areas when weather is uncooperative. Helicopter security and search and rescue support availability has generally been the limiting factor for coca fumigation in more isolated growing areas, but this year, spraying has also been successful in such sectors because of advance deployment of helicopters from temporary bases supplied with fuel bladders and protected by the Colombian military. The number of hits from ground-fire against spray planes and helicopters decreased markedly this year because of tactical operational changes and better intelligence about the presence of narco-terrorist elements protecting coca fields.

As coca comes increasingly under attack, we expect that growers and traffickers will react initially by planting in more isolated areas and protecting their fields more vigorously. This tactic is a reversion to the patterns before the coca boom of the late 1990s and will largely be unsuccessful. First, because the Government of Colombia has demonstrated that it can eradicate in isolated areas, and second, because production costs will increase. It is enormously expensive to clear jungle, import labor, and transport coca leaf and cocaine base from areas that are truly isolated and lacking infrastructure. As the major narco-terrorist organizations are pressured militarily by operations now underway in Colombia's Plan Patriota, their ability to protect growing zones from fumigation, provide technical assistance, and maintain administrative control over production and marketing will diminish, making coca production riskier and financially unattractive.

Additional coca cultivation in sites in Peru and Bolivia are possible, but there is no evidence of a substantial increase in those areas at this time. Total coca cultivation for both countries declined from an estimated 61,000 hectares in 2002 to 59,600 hectares at the end of 2003. At 28,450 hectares, Bolivian cultivation levels are barely half the 52,900 hectares registered during the peak year of 1989. Peru's coca cultivation in 2003 fell to 31,150 hectares, the lowest level since the mid-1980's when we were first able to measure illicit crops with a high degree of accuracy. Since 1995, our programs have caused coca cultivation in Peru and Bolivia to drop by 73 percent and 42 percent respectively.

On a world scale, the United States remains a small consumer of heroin. U.S. addicts consume under five percent of the world's production. But, with the vast amount of international trade, commerce, and visitors crossing our borders annually, the U.S. is vulnerable to the illicit movement of numerous small shipments of heroin. Most heroin is still smuggled into the U.S. in quantities ranging from 1-5 kilograms, quantities easily concealed in luggage, on one's person, swallowed, hidden easily in trucks and automobiles, or "lost" in large cargo shipments.

Colombia and Mexico are the major sources of heroin consumed in the United States. Colombian heroin is produced by small, independent drug trafficking organizations and distributed to the United States via airline couriers and maritime traffickers. With U.S. assistance, Colombia has installed inspection systems in its international airports and has continued a major effort to eradicate heroin poppy. The key distinction between heroin and cocaine trafficking patterns is that heroin has traditionally been transported in much smaller quantities, making it much more difficult to find within the millions of private and commercial conveyances that cross our borders annually.

In 2003, Colombia aeriually sprayed nearly 3,000 hectares of opium poppy and about 1,000 more were eradicated voluntarily in connection with alternative development programs. As of the beginning of June 2004, Colombia had sprayed about 1,600 hectares of opium poppy. Pure heroin production potential in Colombia has remained relatively constant at about 11 pure metric tons/year for the past five years, with a modest decrease noted in 2003.

Environmental Consequences of Illicit Coca Cultivation

Colombia's efforts against narco-terrorist organizations are undercutting the cocaine business which is directly responsible for major environmental destruction and loss of pristine rainforest habitat. Drug trafficking organizations encourage the massive migration of poor, landless individuals to lowland jungles and Andean forests, including Colombia's National Parks, to cultivate opium poppy and coca. Traffickers have concentrated their activities in areas that are particularly valuable from an ecological point of view, including the Orinoco and Amazon basins and Colombia's eastern plains. Colombia estimates that in the last 11 years, one million hectares of tropical forest and Andean cloud forest have been lost to illicit cultivation.

Working in remote areas beyond settled populations, coca growers routinely slash and burn virgin forestland to make way for their illegal crops. Tropical rains quickly erode the thin topsoil of the fields, increasing soil runoff, depleting soil nutrients, and, by destroying timber and other resources that would otherwise be available for more sustainable uses, decreasing biological diversity. The destructive cycle continues as growers regularly abandon non-productive parcels to prepare new plots. At the same time, traffickers destroy jungle forests to build clandestine landing strips and laboratories for processing raw coca and poppy into cocaine and heroin. Colombia estimates that for every hectare of coca produced, four hectares of jungle are destroyed.

Typical coca farmers in Colombia use three major categories of environmentally damaging and persistent chemicals: (1) various mixes of class I to III insecticides and fungicides (usually applied without safety protection), (2) gasoline and acids used by the farmers to produce their saleable coca base, and (3) various fertilizers and herbicides (including paraquat and tamaron). Most of these coca farming chemicals do not readily degrade into harmless by-products (like glyphosate does in 3-4 days), remaining in the soil and water for very long periods. Also, the toxicity of these chemicals is very different from glyphosate—many are extremely toxic for humans, birds, and other fauna and flora. Glyphosate, on the other hand, is a category IV chemical that degrades in the soil in 3-4 days into harmless by-products that do not affect the environment.

Interdiction

United States supported counterdrug efforts have increased the amount of cocaine interdicted in Colombia and in the transit zone. Colombian antidrug forces destroyed 83 finished cocaine (HCl) laboratories in 2003, surpassing their 2001 record of 63 finished cocaine labs destroyed. They also captured more than 48 metric tons of cocaine/cocaine base, 1,500 metric tons of solid precursors and 750,000 gallons of liquid precursor processing chemicals. The greatest amount of cocaine was interdicted at sea. In the last quarter of 2003, Colombian forces increased their success rate against “go-fast” boats, inexpensive high-powered vessels capable of carrying 500 to 3,000 kilograms per load. Go-fast boats can sustain speeds of more than 25 knots and are difficult to find at sea. One of our most important interdiction requirements is to be able to identify these vessels when they are underway and have maritime and helicopter assets in the area to bring them to a stop and arrest the operators.

As I reported in March to the House Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy, and Human Resources, our success rate against go-fast boats has increased notably, especially against targets departing from the North Coast of Colombia. Taking advantage of improved cooperation with the United Kingdom and Colombia, it has been possible to interdict a high proportion of these boats as they depart Colombia. We believe it will be possible to further increase interdiction effectiveness by concentrating assets on maritime shipment in and near the Colombian littoral, and by working more effectively with the Government of Mexico to capture shipments that transit Mexico by land.

Achievements in Colombia

With the decline of the largest Colombian drug cartels, control of production of cocaine has largely passed to the illegal armed groups, while the Colombian criminal drug organizations still control most of the international marketing and distribution of cocaine. Our continuing support for the Government of Colombia is crucial as that country presses on two fronts to end drug-financed violence through military victory or negotiation. The Andean Counterdrug Initiative is well-designed to maintain an essential level of support in fiscal year 2005 and prepare Colombia to finish its task of expanding democracy and the rule of law throughout its national territory.

Colombia has also attacked drug trafficking organizations effectively. Under President Uribe, 104 traffickers have been extradited to the U.S., 68 in 2003 and 14 just this year. Indictments for the Rodriguez-Orejuela brothers were recently unsealed and we hope to see them extradited soon. The Government of Colombia has further disrupted the operations of many of the trafficking groups, including the FARC and AUC, by arresting or removing operational leaders, such as: a FARC General staff member, a FARC Cundinamarca Mini-Bloc commander and his replacement, and the accountant for the Cali cartel.

Under President Uribe, Colombia has reduced the number of human rights violations by weakening terrorist organizations and taking control of territory formerly controlled by narco-terrorist groups. From 2002 to 2003, kidnappings were down 26 percent, homicides were down 20 percent (the lowest rate since 1987), and massacres decreased 33 percent. Allegations of human rights violations committed by the military have dropped from in excess of 40 percent of all

allegations seven years ago to less than two percent of all allegations in 2003. While any human rights violation or willful collaboration with human rights violators by the military is unacceptable, Colombia has made remarkable progress and the military is winning back the trust of the people.

Colombia's military in the first phase of their Plan Patriota succeeded in driving the FARC from the Department of Cundinamarca and the area around Bogota. This left the citizens of that metropolis with a greater sense of security, and returned the most populous region of the country back to the people. Prior to Colombia's military operation, innocent civilians had been subject to kidnapping and extortion at FARC roadblocks, even on principal arteries, whenever they ventured out of the Bogota metropolitan area. If Bogota were Washington, it would have been as if residents could not drive beyond Centerville or Laurel without fear of attack.

In 2003, the FARC lost about twelve percent of their estimated fighting force, including 1,367 who deserted, according to Government of Colombia estimates. If Colombia is successful in removing the largest narco-terrorist organizations from the field as effective illegal armed groups, the counter-drug equation and economic equation will change dramatically. Foreign investment, which is already improving, should increase, and middle-class Colombians who left the country at the height of the terror, increasingly, will be motivated, both economically and for security reasons, to return. Colombia's capacity to unilaterally control illicit drug production will dramatically increase as central government authority and power grows and the expense of a military campaign decreases.

Conclusion

We have witnessed accelerated accomplishments under the Uribe Administration in strategic areas that will cause the cocaine industry to collapse in Colombia. If the eradication tempo is maintained, we will see a halving of the amount of cultivation from the peak in 2001. The FARC and AUC narco-terrorist organizations are under pressure from the military, and if that pressure is maintained, their viability as major narco-terrorist organizations is doubtful.

U.S. assistance in Colombia has been put to productive use as the government there is dedicated to bringing peace and democracy to the entire country and it understands the role that drug trafficking organizations play in supporting Colombia's two main terror threats. The government is strong, effective, and has overwhelming popular support. We do not frequently see such a convergence of factors that make possible a major and permanent disruption of the illicit drug industry.

It is important to maintain pressure so long as we have the opportunity to reduce the drug industry to the point that it cannot build itself back up. If we stop now, with viable infrastructure in the industry still operative, coca cultivation can be reconstituted. If we continue and truly break the industry, Colombia and its Andean neighbors can be in a position to sustain eradication and law enforcement with modest U.S. assistance. That would be a remarkable achievement and will cause a sharp reduction in the number of lives destroyed and families wrecked by cocaine abuse in our nation. We are truly grateful to Congress for allocating the necessary funding for the successes achieved and ask that Congress sustain the current level of funding in concurrence with the President's Fiscal Year 2005 Funding Request.