

**Opening Statement
Chairman Dan Burton**

**Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere
Committee on International Relations**

**Oversight Hearing
“Counternarcotics Strategies in Latin America”**

Date: March 30, 2006

With vigilance we are making progress in our counter-narcotics programs in Latin America. But there are challenges to keep up the pace and reinforce existing programs. We have lost critical hardware used in the eradication and interdiction of narcotics in the Andean region. We have diverted some equipment to other theaters of operation. There are gaps in our surveillance of key areas of the illicit drug transit zone in Central America and the Caribbean due to declining availability of air and surface patrol craft. These problems need to be remedied.

Last week the U.S. District Court in Washington indicted 50 FARC leaders on charges of sending more than \$25 billion worth of cocaine around the world to finance terrorism. The indictment estimates that the FARC supplies more than half of the world's cocaine and 60 percent of the drug that enters the United States. This indictment is the culmination of extensive counter-narcotics cooperation. We need to keep up the pressure on the drug traffickers through close law enforcement coordination. We will hear more about the indictment from our first panel.

Two weeks ago the Burton Amendment to the *Supplemental Appropriations Act for Defense, the Global War on Terror, and Hurricane Recovery, 2006* passed with bipartisan support in the House. Our Amendment offers \$26.3 million in assistance to Colombia for the purchase of three new DC-3 fixed-wing aircraft to serve as Marine Patrol Aircraft (MPA) for Colombian Navy drug interdiction efforts. The aircraft will help the Colombian Navy locate and stop illegal narcotics shipments both onshore and immediately off the Colombian shoreline, thus making overall interdiction efforts more effective.

It has been reported that if drug traffickers make it to the coasts of Colombia, they have a 65 percent chance of getting their shipments into the United States. In our on-going efforts to protect our homeland, it is essential that we cut off this toxic pipeline before these drugs make it onto our streets and communities. If we can prevent these drugs from leaving Colombia, we help cut back on regional violence, limit the bloodshed on the U.S.-Mexican border and protect our children from harm.

The strategic objective of this hearing is to provide Subcommittee members with insights to the Annual International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, an assessment of funding levels and performance indicators for strategies including eradication, interdiction, surveillance and other aspects of the drug war.

We are pleased to have Assistant Secretary Patterson with us to testify on our counter-narcotics strategy in Latin America. Your testimony today will help provide the Subcommittee with an update on trends in major illicit drug producing, drug transit, source, precursor chemical and money laundering countries.

I am interested to hear your views on how we can improve cooperative partnerships in Latin America in combating narcotics production and trafficking to the United States.

The International Narcotics Strategy Report, is published annually by the State Department's Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs. The report provides a useful snapshot of the progress and challenges we face in the Drug War.

The progress in Colombia is significant. In 2005, kidnappings were down 51 percent and homicides by 13 percent. Last year with U.S. and international support, Colombia destroyed 170,000 hectares of illegal coca through aerial and manual eradication programs. I received an update earlier this month from the State Department that Colombia's military and police forces captured a record 223 metric tons of cocaine and cocaine base. The amount of cocaine that was kept off the streets of the United States totaled 378 metric tons with an estimated street value of \$38 billion. In 2005, an all-time high of 134 people were extradited from Colombia to face charges in the U.S. Mexico extradited a record 41 criminals and expelled other fugitives last year.

Aggressive aerial spraying is forcing drug traffickers to move shop, and they are on the run replanting in other parts of Colombia and crossing borders into Ecuador and Peru. This balloon effect must be tamped down.

Peru and Bolivia remain the second and third largest producers of coca. Bolivia is the world's third-biggest producer of cocaine, after Colombia and Peru. We have witnessed mixed signals from the new President. One day he says he wants to work together to fight drugs, the next day he appears in front of a banner reading "Long live coca. Death to the Yankees." Clearly our relationship with the new government in Bolivia is changing and will depend upon the policies they adopt on a wide range of issues, including counter-narcotics.

Another key relationship in the region is under strain. Venezuela was de-certified last year after failing to adhere to obligations under international counter-narcotics agreements. The Venezuelan Government effectively suspended cooperation to reduce illicit cultivation, interdiction, law enforcement cooperation, extraditing drug traffickers, and taking legal steps and law enforcement measures to prevent and punish public corruption that facilitates drug trafficking or impedes prosecution of drug-related crimes. We have received reports from investigations of smuggling activity that led to the arrests of Venezuelan authorities, and this is especially troubling.

In order to balance our security and commercial interests in the Andean region, many of us believe it is essential to consider the important role that licit industries in these countries have played in supporting U.S. policy goals. The promotion of sustainable licit substitute crops can be an engine of economic growth for rural development and to communities ravaged by violence. There is a link between lawlessness, drugs and poverty in Latin America. The Administration has shown a serious commitment to tackle these problems. Our security policies and our commercial policies require constant inter-agency coordination. If we are trying to promote alternative crop development for coca growers, by all means we should be offering viable commercial incentives as well.

I also support multilateral initiatives like the OAS's Inter-American Commission Against Drug Abuse (CICAD) which is conducting multilateral evaluations and offering recommendations to the 34 OAS member countries, including the U.S., on how to strengthen and better coordinate counter-narcotics programs. We need a comprehensive regional strategy to go after the links between drug trafficking, money laundering, terrorist financing and illicit arms trafficking.

Drug traffickers are constantly on the lookout for weaknesses in the firewalls that we build in cooperation with countries in the region. The international community must not disengage or ease back in the drug war. Multi-ton seizures of cocaine were once rare in Europe, but they are increasing in number and yield. European criminal organizations and terrorist groups are trafficking in drugs from the Andes to Spain and the rest of Europe. Later this year we will be looking closely at European contributions to the Latin America Drug War.

I look forward to continued vigilance in the months and years ahead, to better coordination, and to working together to reinforce the progress we have made. I now recognize the distinguished ranking member from New York, Eliot Engel, for any statement he may wish to make.