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**Group's New Study, Web Page Provide Access to Hard-to-Find  
Information about U.S. Military Aid to Latin America**

The Latin America Working Group, a Washington-based coalition of sixty nongovernmental organizations, has just completed a year-long study of the U.S. government's relationship with Latin America's powerful militaries. **"The U.S. - Latin American military relationship is bigger than we thought, involves more programs than we thought, and receives a lot less oversight than we thought,"** said Joy Olson, director of the Latin America Working Group and co-author of *Just the Facts: a civilian's guide to defense and security assistance to Latin America and the Caribbean*.

*Just the Facts* is available both as a book and as a web page <<http://www.ciponline.org/facts/>>. Its authors, Joy Olson and Adam Isacson, will present their findings at a press conference on **Tuesday, July 14, 1998, at 10:00 AM in the Murrow Room of the National Press Club** (529 14th St. NW). The conference will be followed by a brief demonstration of the *Just the Facts* web page. Both authors are able to answer questions in Spanish.

U.S.-Latin American military cooperation occurs through dozens of arms transfers, training programs, deployments and exercises, military bases and other "military-to-military contact" activities. Grant assistance to Latin America's militaries and police forces is expected to total more than a quarter of a billion dollars during 1998, while tens of thousands of U.S. troops are being deployed to the region on a wide variety of missions.

With the publication of *Just the Facts*, reporters, scholars, and interested citizens worldwide can begin to grasp the elusive "big picture" of U.S. cooperation with Latin American security forces. "The 'big picture' has been hard to get because military and police assistance is fragmented across a confusing thicket of aid programs, governed by different laws and carried out by different government agencies," said co-author Adam Isacson. "Aid goes through many 'spigots' and public reporting is very spotty, so oversight is weak and loopholes have been created which have been used to evade human rights restrictions."

An example of this proliferation of funding sources is a new riverine counternarcotics program for the militaries of Colombia and Peru. This single program has been funded in the last year through a special authorization in the Defense Department's budget and money from an asset forfeiture fund that the White House's "Drug Czar" channeled

through the State Department. With so many agencies, funders and laws involved, effective oversight is almost impossible.

As *Just the Facts* illustrates, counternarcotics is the rationale for most U.S. military and police aid today. Anti-drug aid comes increasingly through the Pentagon's budget instead of traditional foreign aid legislation. Congressional oversight of aid provided through the defense budget is much weaker -- one congressional staffer described it to the study's authors as "management by exception." A defense budget account known as "section 1004," for instance, allows the U.S. military to train and equip the region's armies and police forces without human rights restrictions or congressional reporting requirements. As a result, said Olson, "the Pentagon's section 1004 account is an informational 'black hole.'"

*Just the Facts* recommends a simple but badly-needed change that would greatly increase transparency over the U.S.-Latin American military relationship. Information about all training activities with Latin American security personnel, regardless of the laws authorizing them or the agencies carrying them out, should be reported to Congress in a unified, easy-to-access document. *Just the Facts* has sought to provide this information about Latin America.

As it presents the "official story" garnered from government sources, *Just the Facts* is an indispensable first resource for journalists, scholars, activists, and citizens worldwide concerned with the United States' relationship with the Western Hemisphere's militaries.

### **Early comments about *Just the Facts*:**

"With the publication of *Just the Facts*, the public is now afforded an opportunity to have access to a valuable compendium of information about the little-known and complex world of U.S. funding of security assistance to Latin American countries. With this valuable research tool, the public will be able to form and articulate a more informed opinion of this funding and become more of a partner in debate on this subject. Such a debate is long overdue and it is my hope that, as a result, congressional consideration of the several aid programs to be funded -- and congressional oversight of these programs once funded -- will be more vigorous in the future." -- *Ronald V. Dellums, former member, U.S. House of Representatives, former chairman, House Committee on National Security*

"United States military relations and programs with other countries are important components in the conduct of United States foreign policy. Unfortunately, the Congress has not done sufficient oversight with respect to the hundreds of programs that are funded each year as part of the annual Defense, State and USAID appropriations process. As a result, the Congress and the American people may not fully understand and appreciate the implications of such programs in the countries where they are operating. *Just the Facts*, a project of the Latin America Working Group and the Center for International Policy, is a first step to getting a handle on the details of ongoing programs in Latin America and the Caribbean region, and should prove to be an important resource and guide for more effective Congressional oversight." -- *Sen. Christopher J. Dodd, Democrat of Connecticut*

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