

Shared Responsibility: Colombia's proposal against illicit drugs



Shared Responsibility is an internationally recognised principle that calls for all parties affected by the global problem of illicit drugs to joint action. And, it is the name of an initiative led by Colombia since 2005. The Shared Responsibility initiative seeks to establish a frank, open and constant dialogue between illicit drug producer and consumer countries, in order to raise awareness about the threats that the production, trafficking and abuse of cocaine pose to families, public health, national security, the environment and society in general.

Drug trafficking is a crime that surpasses the boundaries of nations and regions, requiring that countries come together and join efforts in order to create plausible solutions. Shared Responsibility is the principle in the fight against drugs that arises from the awareness that the drug-trafficking problem affects both producer and consumer countries.

Shared Responsibility is an open invitation to the international community to work together and put an end to the illicit and criminal activities linked to drug trafficking, because the main weapon against drugs is cooperation between nations. It's not about sharing the blame; it's about sharing the responsibility for finding solutions.

In the case of Colombia, illegal armed groups are funded by the production and trafficking of cocaine. The profits are huge and fuel violent acts in Colombia every day. The FARC, the largest terrorist group in Colombia, earns between US\$500 million and US\$1 billion every year from illicit drugs.

This money precipitates violence, impacts homicide rates, finances landmines and car bombs, represents a threat to democracy and gives rise to forced displacement, human trafficking and forced child recruitment. Furthermore, the very act of cultivating and processing cocaine devastates Colombia's unique environment.

The 53 countries that make up the Commonwealth are either familiar with or have directly experienced the effects of the cocaine trade on their own peoples. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police's 2004 Drug Report recognises that consumption of cocaine increased from 3.8 per cent in 1994 to 10.6 per cent in 2005. Canadian cocaine seizures for 2004 surpassed 3 tonnes.

The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)'s 2006 Drug Report estimates that Australia's consumption is now equal to Italy's, but still below the UK's, Wales's, Ireland's and Scotland's. This same report estimates that, in South Africa, demand for cocaine addiction treatment rose from 7 per cent in 1996 to 16 per cent in 2005. In February of 2007, the Johannesburg press reported that bands of high school girls were organising cocaine parties by sending cell-phone text messages. According to the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), the UK has the highest level of recent use among young adults, over 4 per cent, similar to the United States.

In addition to the recognised rise in cocaine consumption, alternative methods of measuring demand have shown that consumption may be higher than reported. For instance, the Nuremberg Institute for Biomedical and Pharmaceutical



This young Nukak Maku is a member of one of the last remaining nomad tribes on earth, many of whose members have been displaced by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, FARC.

Research tested the waters of the River Thames for traces of benzoylecgonine, a by-product produced by the human liver following cocaine consumption, and found that those living along London's main river were consuming 26,709 doses of 100 milligrams per day.

The Shared Responsibility principle and practice

Colombia is appealing to the Shared Responsibility principle as it seeks joint solutions to a problem that, because of the size and magnitude of its impact, could not be confronted in any other way.

In order to minimise the global impact of drug trafficking, the

international community needs to come together to enact legislation to control the chemical precursors that are used to process drugs, to halt money laundering operations that provide resources for terrorists, and to confiscate the cocaine that is destroying lives around the world. Colombia welcomes the opportunity to work together with any nation to formulate and implement joint policies, complementary to those already in place. The implementation of such shared policies is urgently needed if the global community is to begin reducing the damage drug trafficking brings to the environment, human rights, social development and democracy itself.

In Africa, many countries are suffering the consequences that cocaine trafficking brings to a region, highlighting the urgency of this problem. As Kenya's regional UNODC branch reported just last year: "Illicit drug trafficking has brought to the sub-region a wide range of serious and organised criminal activity including murder, kidnapping and extortion... Gangs of criminals, often under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol, act with total disregard for life or property and car-jacking, robbery and domestic burglary are commonplace... Women in particular are also vulnerable to accompanying acts of wanton sexual assault and rape, with a high degree of risk of contracting HIV/Aids or other sexually transmitted diseases."

To facilitate the work already being done to reduce both supply and demand for cocaine, Shared Responsibility puts forth the following areas of cooperation.

Sending the Shared Responsibility message across

Given the current increase in cocaine demand, it seems that knowledge of the irreparable health damage caused by cocaine is not acting as a deterrent. What reasons, then, could possibly motivate the world's new generations to think twice before consuming cocaine? Shared Responsibility seeks to come



up with answers from a different, responsible and environmentally friendly perspective.

Shared Responsibility believes that cocaine abuse would not be increasing if more were known about the way in which it is produced. Tennis shoes have been boycotted, fur rejected, recycled goods marketed, all because of conscientious objection. The Colombian people would like the world to learn about how cocaine is produced.

In November of 2006, five Colombian victims of cocaine-financed violence travelled to the cities of London, Birmingham and Basingstoke to tell British students, government officials, and members of the press about how the cocaine trade had changed their lives forever.

In the picture are Natalia, 20, kidnapped for three years by the cocaine-financed FARC terrorists; Aura, 39, displaced by the cocaine-financed paramilitaries; Charlene, 40, forced at gunpoint to become a 'drug mule'; Jacqueline, 32, tricked by an ex-boyfriend into transporting cocaine; Emperatriz, 70, mother of a policeman who died while kidnapped by the FARC; Rosie, 27, physically abused by drug-addict boyfriend; Margarita, 50, whose godson was murdered so she would keep quiet about identity of people who forced her to transport drugs; Luisa, 35, ex-drug addict whose husband died from overdose and who is forbidden from seeing her children.

All of them met in Basingstoke to share experiences with local students, the BBC and other members of the press, town councilmen and each other.

Shared Responsibility believes that by attending or even by learning of these meetings, people, especially the younger generations, will see a side of cocaine use that is far from glamorous, thereby deactivating the unmerited appeal that cocaine seems to exert on the population. These encounters can be organised, complementarily to existing local drug prevention strategies, and will provide drug educators with new, high-impact material to combat increasing cocaine use.

Slash and burn: coca growing's legacy to mankind

Cocaine is falsely thought of as a 'clean' drug. A look at the following list of ingredients is enough to rethink that position on cocaine: gasoline, sulphuric acid, lime, cement and potassium permanganate, to name a few. If you add to that around 85,000 tonnes and 12 million litres of pesticides, herbicides and fertilisers used in Colombia to produce cocaine in 2005 you get a clearer picture of the damage this criminal enterprise is causing to this richly bio-diverse nation.

Before these highly toxic pesticides and herbicides are used on the coca crops, the growers slash and



This patch of tropical forest will recover from the slash and burn technique used by coca growers around 2607.

burn the area they plan to use. According to the World Bank, for every hectare of coca grown, three are burnt to the ground. Dr Keith Solomon, a Canadian expert on the environmental impacts of illicit crops, ranks the slash and burn technique used to clear land for coca growth, as “the single most devastating environmental impact of these crops,” especially given the fact that it takes some 600 years for the burnt land to recover.

After land is cleared, coca growers then burn cut trees and shrubs, generating enough smoke for the American University’s Trade and Environmental Database to estimate

that the slash and burn method used to prepare land for coca growth is a major source of air pollution in the Colombian jungle. Other environmental impacts include erosion, loss of topsoil and habitat alteration. Due to the illicit nature of coca cultivation, crops shift with frequency, leaving behind spoiled landscapes, while creating new ones, in the second most biodiverse nation in the world.

Shared Responsibility has many pictures like the ones included here and could arrange to display them at a public place. These photographs and the opportunity for people to personally see the poisonous

The rows of green plants are coca seedlings, abandoned, along with the surrounding damage, as the counter-narcotics police approached.



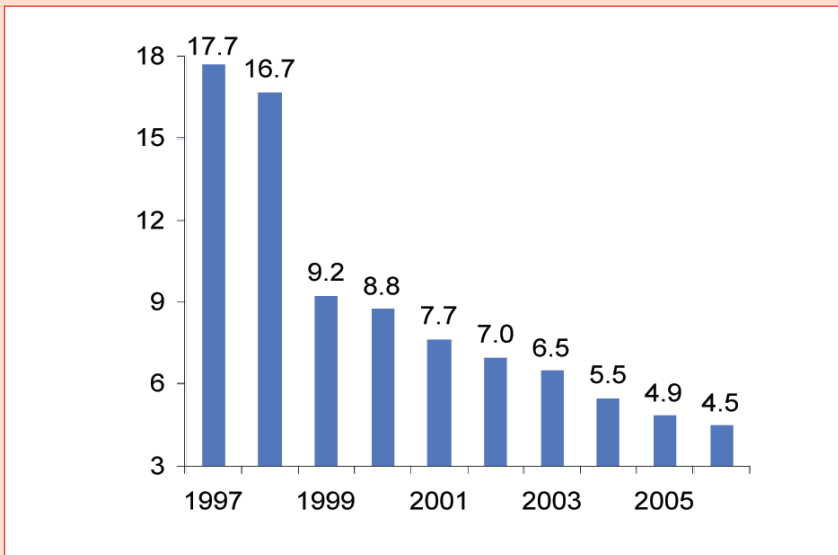
Hearts of palm, products of an alternative development project in southern Colombia, are currently exported to the European Union.

chemicals used to process coca are compelling prevention tools, especially considering today’s environmentally sensitive disposition. As always, material endemic to the local, drug-related problems of a region could be added to make any display even more powerful.

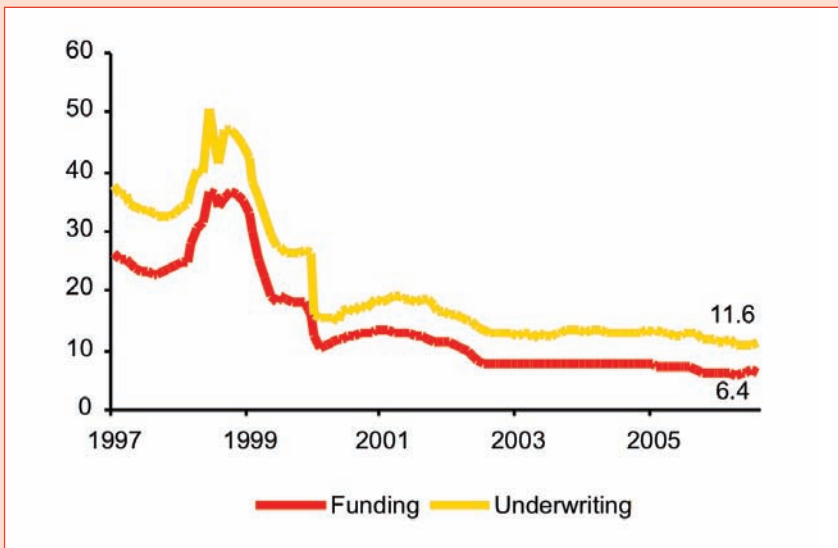
Alternative development: a way out of crime and destruction

Providing coca growers and people in vulnerable areas with alternative and sustainable means with which to make a respectable living is essential to ending coca cultivation, and its international social and environmental effects. Since taking office in 2002, President Álvaro Uribe Vélez has made alternative development for eradicating illicit crops a national priority. To date, the government has invested over US\$100 million, has cleared a total of 1,200,000 hectares of coca crops and is employing 50,000 former coca growers in legal businesses.

Shared Responsibility has a portfolio of alternative development projects ready to be put into action. For example, one project seeks to create an environmentally responsible lumber industry along Colombia’s Pacific coast, benefiting 2,300 families and tackling illegal



Inflation Rate (1997 – 2006) %



Interest Rate (1997 – 2006) %

lumber businesses that threaten the rainforest. Another project hopes to develop four eco-tourism havens, two along Colombia's Caribbean coast and another two near highly bio-diverse places in the country's interior. 128 families would benefit from this project, tourists not included.

Colombia's vast territory is also suited for the mass cultivation of African Palm, a source of biodiesel. To date nine Colombian provinces – Vichada, Caquetá, Casanare, Nariño, Bolívar, Chocó, Norte de Santander, Santander and Magdalena – have been classified as having the necessary conditions to grow African Palm, among other native crops apt for the production of biodiesel. In 2005, according to the UNODC's 2006 report on

Colombia, these nine provinces had 33,751 hectares of coca, representing 38.6 per cent of the total area cultivated in the country. Cargill, Acciona and SIEM are some of the international corporations with an interest in investing in Colombia's future as a biodiesel powerhouse.

Other international financial institutions are seriously considering investing in a multi-million dollar project to create a mega biodiesel-production community in eastern Colombia, where most of the 12,000 newly created jobs (projected) would be destined for demobilised members of illegal armed groups, former coca growers and retired soldiers, bringing individuals formerly at odds with each other together in a pioneer reintegration project.

Strength in numbers

Foreign direct investment in Colombia reached an all-time high in 2005, surpassing the US\$10 billion mark. The previous record, set in 1997, wavered midway between US\$5 billion and 6 billion. Meanwhile, total Colombian exports doubled, from US\$11.6 billion in 1999 to net projected exports in 2006 of close to US\$25 billion. Approximately half of 2006's exports were traditional and the other half non-traditional. This is a good time to invest in Colombia.

Sharing is caring

Countries around the world are suffering the consequences of the cocaine trade. The Commonwealth, in particular, faces an increasing incidence of drug mules, a rise in cocaine consumption and the advent of Africa as a trans-shipment hub, all of which bring significant health risk to a region. Colombia, unfortunately, has first-hand experience of these, and other, adverse drug trafficking repercussions.

Shared Responsibility seeks to bring the international community together to work to raise awareness about the devastating consequences that cocaine brings to the world, helping to prevent cocaine consumption and to reverse cocaine's social acceptability. At the same time, Shared Responsibility invites nations to learn about the importance of supporting the sustainable eradication of coca crops by cooperating with Colombia's alternative development programmes.

Shared Responsibility is a Colombia-led initiative for illicit-drug producing and consuming countries to work on shared solutions to the threat that cocaine production, trafficking and consumption poses to the world.

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