



Prepared Statement of:  
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Hearing before the:  
**Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere,  
Transnational Crime, Civilian Security, Democracy, Human Rights, and  
Global Women's Issues**

**“Assessing the Colombia Peace Process: The Way Forward in  
U.S- Colombia Relations”**

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Chairman Rubio, Ranking Member Menendez, distinguished Members of the Subcommittee; thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss counternarcotics efforts in Colombia after the peace agreement. Implementation of an effective counternarcotics plan for Colombia is more important now than ever. At a time when the Colombian government is implementing a peace accord that promises to keep the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) off the battlefield and out of the illicit economy, we have a limited window of opportunity to roll back the recent troubling narcotics trends that threaten the safety and health of citizens here in the United States as well as in Colombia and throughout the rest of the Western Hemisphere.

The Government of Colombia has been our strong partner in the fight against crime and narcotics for more than two decades. Since 2000, the United States has invested more than \$10 billion to improve citizen security, disrupt the drug trade, and combat criminal networks to advance peace and prosperity. Working with our Colombian partners, our joint efforts have produced positive results. Since 2002, homicides in Colombia have fallen by more than 50 percent and kidnappings have dropped by 90 percent; in 2016, Colombia had its lowest reported homicide rate in 40 years. Our shared successes in the security realm also brought the FARC, which is extensively involved in the drug trade, to the negotiating table and helped make possible the conclusion of a peace accord.

However, after years of progress in combatting coca cultivation and cocaine production, Colombia is once again the world's largest producer of cocaine and is the origin of approximately 90 percent of the cocaine seized in the United States, according to the DEA Cocaine Signature Program. Between 2013 and 2016, coca cultivation in Colombia increased by more than 130 percent, from 80,500 hectares (ha) in 2013 to 188,000 ha in 2016. Perhaps more troubling, pure potential cocaine production surged by more than 200 percent in the same time period, from 235 metric tons produced in 2013 to 710 metric tons in 2016. Cocaine use and overdose deaths in the United States also are on the rise. Following a dramatic decline in cocaine overdose-related deaths in the United States since 2006, this figure has steadily increased since 2012, reaching 6,784 overdose-related deaths in 2015, the highest on record since 2006.

This surge is due to multiple factors. These include Colombia's decision in 2015 to end the U.S.-supported aerial coca eradication program as well as counter-eradication techniques implemented by coca growers. Widespread reporting indicates FARC elements urged coca growers to plant more coca, purportedly motivated by the belief that the Colombian government's post-peace accord

investment and subsidies would focus on regions with the greatest quantities of illicit crops. The Colombian government also reduced forced manual eradication operations in areas controlled by the FARC to lower the risk of armed conflict as the parties negotiated a final peace accord. Finally, Colombia's manual eradication budget has declined by two-thirds since 2008, resulting in a 90 percent reduction in the number of manual eradicators in 2016 compared to 2008.

In the lead up to the official cessation of the aerial eradication program in September 2015, Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos announced a counternarcotics strategy laying out three priority areas: rural development programs to reduce drug cultivation, including voluntary eradication and crop substitution for coca growers; enhanced law enforcement efforts to dismantle organized crime groups; and public health approaches to address domestic drug consumption. These priorities conform to the counternarcotics-related aspects of the peace accord, which focus on a national crop substitution and alternative development plan to be implemented in 44 municipalities where 60 percent of the coca is cultivated.

The voluntary eradication and crop substitution plan includes the creation of a coordination and communication mechanism for crop substitution; hiring technicians to help implement this plan; granting of land titles to program participants; and cash payments for food subsidies, medium-term employment contracts for infrastructure projects, and other payments for long-term crop substitution such as cacao. The United States is not currently supporting the Colombian government's voluntary eradication and crop substitution program because the FARC is involved in some aspects of the program and remains designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization under several U.S. laws and sanctions regimes.

The Colombian government is operationalizing its counternarcotics strategy through the Ministry of Defense (MOD)-led *Centros Estratégicos Operacionales*/Strategic Operational Centers, or "CEOs," concept, which is an integrated, whole-of-government approach to counternarcotics and rural development. In early January, the Colombian government began implementing the CEO concept in the municipality of Tumaco – a critical area for coca cultivation and cocaine production and other illicit activity. The government plans to expand this effort to a total of four CEOs servicing the 11 departments with the highest levels of coca cultivation. Embassy Bogota continues to support the Colombian government in this effort.

To date, the results of Colombia's counternarcotics strategy have been mixed. In 2016, Colombia's land and maritime interdiction of cocaine and cocaine base increased over 40 percent from 2015 to a record high of approximately 421 metric tons, according to Colombian official statistics. Additionally, 4,613 cocaine base labs and 229 cocaine hydrochloride labs were destroyed in 2016. Colombian efforts led to the extradition to the United States of major transnational organized criminals, including Nidal Ahmed Waked-Hatum, and the taking down of narcochiefs, including Victor Ramon Navarro-Cerrano (a.k.a. Megateo).

While these efforts are impressive and the commitment and sacrifice of the Colombia security services to this mission cannot be overstated, significant challenges remain. Chief among them is that drug seizures are simply not keeping pace with the explosion in coca cultivation, which must be addressed with the same vigor as the interdiction mission.

Colombian leadership must find a way to implement a robust forced manual eradication effort to create a disincentive to coca cultivation and an incentive to participation in the government's crop substitution effort. Making manual eradication work includes overcoming the persistent social protests that disrupt forced eradication operations. Without a permanent solution to the social protest issue, forced eradication efforts are unlikely to have a significant effect on coca cultivation levels in 2017. In 2016, 675 attempted eradication operations were cancelled in the field due to restrictive rules of engagement that prevented security forces from engaging protestors. In 2017, the protests continue. On March 28, the Ministry of Defense-led CEO in Tumaco launched a successful eradication operation along the border with Ecuador. To date, approximately 6,000 hectares have been eradicated. However, the operation has been marred by social protests and violence, resulting in the injury of two police officers and the death of a third. The security forces must be empowered to eradicate in national parks, indigenous areas, and the no-fly zones around the FARC disarmament zones, where coca cultivation is at industrial levels. Additionally, proper military-civilian coordination continues to be weak, and the proper financial resources to implement the CEO concept are still inadequate.

To be successful, the Colombian government's voluntary eradication and crop substitution program needs adequate financial and human resources as well as a clear implementation plan to succeed. Currently these are lacking. We are strongly encouraging the Colombian government to limit the number of voluntary eradication agreements they negotiate and sign to make implementation feasible. Voluntary eradication agreements must also have expiration dates so the security

forces can forcibly eradicate in farms where coca growing communities fail to meet their obligations.

In addition to eradication and crop substitution efforts, we have also called on the Colombians to preserve the use of extradition as a law enforcement tool, to ensure narcotraffickers do not fraudulently use the peace accord's transitional justice measures to avoid extradition.

I visited Colombia twice in the past several months, once in March and again in June, to discuss these challenges and outline a plan for moving forward together. First, the U.S. Ambassador to Colombia, Kevin Whitaker, and I led a U.S. Government delegation for a Binational Technical Working Group (BTWG) on counternarcotics in March. The delegation met with senior Government of Colombia officials and conveyed our government's continued concerns regarding the worsening narcotics situation in Colombia. We stressed the urgent need to operationalize a whole-of-government strategy to counternarcotics and rural development in strategic areas of concern. Subsequent to the BTWG, we also met with President Santos and then incoming-Vice President Oscar Naranjo to reinforce these messages. Counternarcotics was a key topic of discussion during President Santos' May 18 meeting with meeting with President Trump, who underscored our deep and growing concern and urged immediate action.

On June 14, Vice President (VP) Naranjo convened a day-long strategic drug policy workshop bringing together a dozen Colombian agencies for a comprehensive assessment of their collective counternarcotics efforts and to lay the groundwork for a "unified vision" to address illicit crops. During the event, which was notable for its participation, structure, and candid conversation, VP Naranjo said disparate counternarcotics strategies had failed because they focused solely on interdiction and eradication programs, and never addressed structural problems causing families to replant coca. He repeatedly stressed Colombia needed a paradigm shift to promote an integrated, whole-of-government approach. We could not agree more.

While concerns persist, my June visit to Colombia with my colleagues on The Interdiction Committee revealed a clear improvement in the direction of Colombia's counternarcotics efforts, and this can almost certainly be attributed to the positive effects of Vice President Naranjo's meeting earlier that month. The most encouraging development during our visit was the clear signal that Colombia is readying its various ministries to launch a second CEO in Antioquia.

The Department of State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) continues to assist the Government of Colombia with its interdiction and coca eradication operations; strengthening the country's rule of law capacity to counter money laundering and prosecute and convict organized criminals; and supporting the expansion of government presence to rural areas to prevent organized criminal groups from gaining a foothold where state presence is weak. As was the case with Plan Colombia, U.S. assistance to support implementation of Colombia's counternarcotics strategy is a fraction of Colombia's overall investment.

The dramatic increase in coca cultivation and cocaine production in Colombia is deeply concerning, and we remain committed to helping the Colombian government deal with this challenge. The stakes could not be higher. Not only will failure to counter drugs jeopardize the hard won gains under Plan Colombia, but emboldened organized criminal groups and huge inflows of illicit earnings will erode citizen security, increase corruption, foment increased illegal immigration, and destabilize neighboring states and Colombia itself, thus undermining the legacy and legitimacy of the peace accord. The Colombian government has been our steadfast partner in the fight against crime and narcotics since before the start of Plan Colombia in 1999. Achieving our shared goals will not be easy, nor quick, but we are confident that we will continue to effectively work together to tackle the considerable challenges before us.