



Prepared Statement of:

Kirsten D. Madison

Assistant Secretary of State for
International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs

Hearing before the:

**Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere, Transnational Crime,
Civilian Security, Democracy, Human Rights, and Global Women's Issues**

**“U.S. – Colombia Relations: New Opportunities to Reinforce and Strengthen
Our Bilateral Relationship”**

September 18, 2019

Chairman Rubio, Ranking Member Cardin, distinguished Members of the Subcommittee; thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the critical importance of our counternarcotics and security cooperation with Colombia. Colombia remains one of our closest allies in the hemisphere. We have worked together for decades to fight narcotics and transnational organized crime, which negatively affect both our nations.

In 2018, the United States and Colombia committed to a five-year goal to cut coca cultivation and cocaine production levels in half by the end of 2023. As President Trump recently noted in the Presidential Determination on Major Drug Transit or Major Illicit Drug Producing Countries for Fiscal Year 2020, Colombia has made early progress in rolling back the record-high coca cultivation and cocaine production levels. This is result of President Duque's aggressive counternarcotics policies and courageous work by the Colombian police and military. It is also the result of our steadfast support. According to the most recent U.S. government estimates, Colombian coca cultivation and cocaine production levels in 2018 decreased for the first time since 2012, following dramatic increases from 2013 to 2017. We still have a long road ahead to meet our ambitious goal and reduce the amount of cocaine entering the United States, but I am confident that, with robust U.S. support, the Colombian government can reverse the troubling trends of the drug threat President Duque inherited just a year ago. We have a common goal, we have a plan that is already yielding results, and, most importantly, under President Duque's leadership, we share the political will to tackle this challenge together.

I was on the staff of this Committee when Congress was considering whether or not to invest – and invest big – in Plan Colombia. In those days, the conversation was about the potential for Colombia to become a failed state. How far Colombia has come from those days. In the past two decades, Colombia transformed from a near-failed state to a vibrant democracy with a stable, market-oriented economy. Joint efforts through Plan Colombia produced security gains that led to the end of the longest conflict in the region's history. Colombia's police and military now have model units for the region that export their security expertise to other partners, acting as a force multiplier of U.S. counternarcotics investment. The recent call to arms by former Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC in Spanish) leaders is troubling, but these latest actions are intended to undermine the nascent peace and security that was won by Colombia's police and military and which the Colombian people want and deserve. We need to stand by Colombia as they press ahead.

At the same time, the global narcotics threat has changed significantly. Illicit armed groups have adapted and transformed from hierarchical, centralized structures to more diffuse, nimble, and interconnected transnational networks empowered by modern technology. That evolution has made responding to transnational organized crime (TOC) harder. Traffickers also exploit encrypted peer-to-peer messaging applications and other emerging communication technologies to circumvent law enforcement. To ensure the success of our counternarcotics investments, we too must adapt. This Administration has committed resources and energy toward building a resilient whole-of-government approach to fighting the drug epidemic on all fronts, and my dedicated team, the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL), is on the frontlines of American diplomacy in this effort. In short, we must build on the successes of Plan Colombia to address the threats of today and the future.

The drug trade is not only a threat to Colombia – it directly affects the safety, security, and health of Americans. Colombia is the world’s largest producer of cocaine and the source of over 90 percent of the cocaine seized in the United States. Cocaine originating from Colombia contributes to the rising drug overdose rates in the United States, particularly when combined with synthetic opioids like fentanyl. In 2017, nearly 14,000 Americans died of cocaine overdose – the highest number on record since 2006. Three-quarters of these deaths involved opioids. U.S. foreign assistance to Colombia and every single gain made against the production and trafficking of cocaine saves American lives.

The Colombian counternarcotics challenge is inextricably linked to and made worse by the Venezuela crisis. The National Liberation Army (ELN in Spanish) and FARC dissident groups, and other Colombia-based TOC groups operate from within Venezuela and use it as a safe haven from Colombian law enforcement. TOC groups bribe corrupt Venezuelan officials to traffic Colombian drugs through Venezuelan territory, with no pushback from the illegitimate Maduro regime. In many cases, these drug traffickers and armed groups, benefit from the covert assistance of Maduro’s corrupt regime. The United States has sanctioned many senior Maduro officials for their complicit support of the drug trade, arms trafficking, and systemic corruption. Colombian air force radar data shows the number of narco-flights originating in Venezuela increased from 66 in 2015 to 224 in 2018, with each flight moving hundreds of kilos of Colombian cocaine north. At the same time, more than 1.4 million Venezuelans who fled the oppressive Maduro regime are living in Colombia, placing a significant strain on the Colombian government’s resources, including those of the security services. Our investments in a strong partnership with Colombia, Peru and – most recently – the relaunch of our programs in Ecuador are critical to countering the poisonous impact of today’s Venezuela.

Colombian drugs fuel the cycle of narco-trafficking violence, corruption, and insecurity in Central America and Mexico that contributes to the migration crisis on our border. We know Colombian drug traffickers forge business relationships with Mexican cartels. Most of the cocaine trafficked from Colombia transits Central America, and it is a significant contributor to the corruption, weak rule of law, and transnational crime plaguing the Northern Triangle, and driving migration from those countries through Mexico to the U.S. border. We are working with our Central American counterparts to address these issues and, importantly, so are the Colombians.

In President Duque we have a partner who has made combating narcotics a top priority for his government, committing resources and political capital to achieve our shared goals. To reach the five-year goal, the U.S. government is assisting President Duque to implement his whole-of-government counternarcotics strategy that includes reducing consumption, decreasing the supply of drugs, dismantling criminal organizations, disrupting financial flows to criminal organizations, and increasing state presence and economic opportunity in rural areas. The Colombian government will focus efforts in five strategic zones: Catatumbo in Norte de Santander; Tumaco and the Pacific Coast in Nariño; the Bajo Cauca region of Antioquia; Arauca department along Colombia’s border with Venezuela; and Caqueta department in southern Colombia. These priority regions account for 65 percent of the country’s coca cultivation and cocaine production.

With INL assistance, President Duque has significantly increased Colombia's eradication efforts. Since taking office in August 2018, President Duque quadrupled the number of highly efficient civilian manual eradication groups from 23 to 100. Thanks to this surge, Colombia eradicated more than 86,000 hectares of coca in 2018, the highest amount of hectares eradicated since 2012. This massive effort, achieved with INL assistance, stopped the expansion of coca cultivation for the first time since 2012. Eradication progress continues into 2019. Colombia destroyed 56 percent more coca in the first six months of 2019 than during the same period in 2018. In addition to our critical aviation support, INL provides Colombian eradicators with logistics, field equipment, supplies, and life-saving counter improvised explosive device (IED) training and detectors.

On July 18, Colombia's Constitutional Court gave the Colombian government the authority to restart aerial spray of glyphosate on coca once it meets certain administrative and oversight conditions. The unanimous decision assigns responsibility to the government's National Drug Council (CNE) to weigh any potential risks of glyphosate on health and the environment against its responsibility to reduce record levels of coca cultivation. In light of the court's decision and at the request of the Duque administration, INL will work with the Colombian government to restart a targeted, Colombian-led aerial eradication program that meets the administrative and oversight conditions upheld by the court. Aerial eradication is not a silver bullet, but it is an effective and safe tool that along with manual eradication, crop substitution, alternative development, and expanded police presence can help Colombia sustainably reduce cocaine production. Colombia's earlier reduction of coca cultivation, between 2007 and 2012, was due in large part to sustained, high levels of both manual and aerial eradication. Unlike Plan Colombia, the U.S. government will only play a supporting role in a potential Colombian-led aerial eradication program, and INL will continue to support manual eradication as the backbone of Colombia's integrated eradication strategy.

Under President Duque, Colombian police and military forces continue to interdict incredible amounts of cocaine and destroy record number of labs. In 2018, Colombian and third-country security forces using Colombian intelligence interdicted more than 450 metric tons of pure cocaine and cocaine base. INL is helping the Colombian Navy build and operate a chain of radar stations that provide key intelligence to support interdiction operations along Colombia's Pacific coast, the departure point for the majority of U.S.-bound cocaine according to the Drug Enforcement Administration. INL is also supporting the expansion of interdiction operations along Colombia's rivers, particularly in the remote and high-coca-growing area of Nariño. Over the last six months, with INL support, Colombian National Police (CNP) launched Operations Resplendor I, II, III, and Osiris, which collectively destroyed more than 821 base labs, 25 cocaine labs, and six precursor production labs. According to official Colombian government statistics, through July, Colombian forces have destroyed 68 percent more base labs and 5 percent more cocaine labs than during the same period in 2018.

With U.S. assistance, Colombia also leads a powerful regional approach to maritime interdiction, producing impressive results by leveraging resources throughout the region. Since April 2018, Colombia has led three multi-national maritime interdiction operations resulting in the seizure of nearly 100 metric tons of cocaine. During Orion 3, the first of these operations planned under President Duque in the spring of 2019, the Colombian navy led 18 partner navies, and leveraged U.S. contributions from INL, the U.S. Coast Guard, and Joint Interagency Task

Force South (JIATF South), that resulted in the seizure of 48 metric tons of cocaine—a jump of 160 percent from the previous operation just four months prior.

The Colombian government continues its rigorous pace of high-value target operations against transnational criminal organizations (TCOs). In 2019, the Colombian army alone captured nearly 2,200 members from the ELN, FARC dissident groups, and Clan del Golfo, nearly double the number arrested in 2018. In May, the CNP captured Olindo Perlaza, alias Gafas, for trafficking narcotics from Colombia's Pacific coast through Panama, Guatemala, and Mexico to the United States. Colombian police say Perlaza, who is wanted for extradition to the United States, had the capacity to ship four tons of cocaine a month, in collaboration with the Sinaloa Cartel.

Beyond counternarcotics and law enforcement operations, INL is helping the Colombians follow the money. Our assistance helps the Colombian government go after the profits of criminal groups by providing anti-money laundering training and support for managing seized assets. Criminal groups often control areas where illegal gold mining occurs and use illegal gold to supplement profits from narcotrafficking and other illicit activities. INL-trained Colombian investigators built cases against Colombia's two largest gold companies for laundering a total of \$1.4 billion in illicit revenue, according to the Colombian Attorney General's Office. The Colombian investigators credited INL training with improving their capacity to trace hidden sources of illegal money and gold. INL supports the Colombian government's efforts to liquidate thousands of seized properties throughout the country, which will generate millions of dollars to bolster Colombia's counternarcotics resources.

These impressive counternarcotics efforts led to the decrease in coca cultivation and cocaine production for the first time in five years, but bringing the coca numbers down is just one step. The key to our long-term success in Colombia will be the implementation of a whole-of-government approach that helps sustain our near-term operational counternarcotics results by expanding rural governance and development. The absence of criminal justice institutions and police in key areas of the country creates a permissive environment for coca cultivation and drug trafficking, enabling criminal groups to thrive by generating insecurity and preventing long-term licit economic development. Without long-term support for citizen security and licit livelihoods, our short-term gains on eradication and interdiction will not last.

USAID efforts are critical in this regard, as are Colombian and other international donor investments. INL's rule of law and rural security programs, working in tandem with USAID's alternative development and land titling activities, are fundamental in helping the Colombian government meet the basic needs of rural communities. Poor infrastructure in rural areas makes logistics of accessing markets an enormous obstacle. Willingness alone is not sufficient to overcome development challenges. Communities need roads, business and vocational training, and technological advances.

To promote rural security in Colombia and sustain counternarcotics results, INL is supporting the construction of three rural police bases in key narcotrafficking and historically FARC-controlled areas in Antioquia, Caquetá, and Guaviare, with other expansion sites planned for the coming years. INL supports the CNP stationed in critical rural narcotrafficking areas with training and other technical assistance to enable the police and local communities to jointly

address the root causes of criminal activity and resist the influence of criminal organizations. A component of this effort is the integration of women into citizen security and development. In June, the United States and Colombia launched the U.S.-Colombia partnership on women, peace, and security recognizing the pivotal roles Colombian women have played in overcoming conflict, building security, and investing in peace and economic prosperity. The Department will support this initiative through a range of efforts, including INL assistance focused on helping the Colombian National Police recruit more women into its ranks from underserved communities.

To expand access to justice in Colombia and protect human rights, INL is investing in training and technical assistance across the justice sector to build Colombia's professional capacity to investigate and prosecute complex crimes. INL is increasing its support to the Colombian government to address human rights violations, including prosecuting those who threaten and commit crimes against human rights defenders and social leaders. Our efforts to promote rule of law and the protection of human rights in rural areas are directly linked with our counternarcotics efforts. The killings of human rights defenders are most prevalent where you find armed criminal groups and coca growth.

Finally, through the U.S.-Colombia Action Plan (USCAP) on Regional Security Cooperation, Colombia exports its hard-won security expertise to partners in the hemisphere. Each year, INL supports more than 300 USCAP activities implemented by the CNP and the Colombian Navy in 10 partner countries along key narco-trafficking routes for cocaine destined for the United States. Beyond training, this program is creating regional law enforcement connections that reinforce our broader efforts against transnational criminal networks. Transnational problems need transnational solutions. As our strongest counternarcotics partner in the region, Colombia has the capability and political will to lead a new counterdrug network for the Americas.

My January visit to Colombia days after an attack on a Colombian National Police Academy in Bogota that killed 22 people and left dozens wounded reminded me that security and justice do not come cheaply. Besides Colombia's significant financial investment in counternarcotics, Colombian soldiers, police, and eradicators continue to put their lives on the line. In 2019, IEDs have killed nine and wounded 49 eradicators, the same number of deaths and casualties for all of 2018. Despite the cost, during my visits to Colombia and subsequent meetings with senior Colombian officials in Washington, I am encouraged by the unwavering commitment to achieve our ambitious five-year goal from the highest level of the Colombian government to the *campesino* manual eradicator risking his life to remove coca from some of the most dangerous terrain in Colombia.

Chairman Rubio, Ranking Member Cardin, distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, we have not even completed the first full year of our five-year goal to reduce coca cultivation and cocaine production by half by the end of 2023, and Colombia is already demonstrating significant results. I cannot emphasize enough the enormity of the task. The Colombian government is facing serious challenges: near record high coca cultivation and cocaine production levels inherited from the previous administration, the implementation of a complex 310-page peace plan that touches every sector of Colombian society, and strained resources due to the Venezuela crisis. Reaching this goal will require Colombia to eradicate coca at unprecedented rates, to work with neighboring countries throughout the region to combat agile

and resourceful criminal networks, and to continue to allocate substantial resources toward counternarcotics. We will continue to encourage the Colombian government and other donor countries to do more, but we must also continue robust U.S. support for our Colombian partners in a joint effort to prevent deadly drugs from reaching the streets of the United States.