

Caught in the Crossfire

Developing countries, the UNDCP, and the war on drugs

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A Joint publication of the Transnational Institute (TNI) and the Catholic Institute for International Relations (CIIR), June 1998

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Introduction

A cleaner enters an empty hall at the United Nations building in New York to prepare the room for an important meeting. A voice-over explains: "Here in this room, on the 8th, 9th and 10th of June, world leaders will join forces to confront the drugs problem". As the cleaner sprays cleaning liquid onto a globe, the scene cuts to a roaring helicopter spraying herbicides. There follow images of burning drugs crops, heavily armed soldiers and a farmer processing coffee. At the end, the voice concludes: "A drug free world - We can do it!"

This advertisement will soon appear on television screens across the world. It is an attempt to rally public support for the "United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) to Counter the World Drug Problem Together", to be held in New York in June. The advertisement was first shown in Vienna during a meeting of the Commission on Narcotics Drugs (CND) from 16-20 March, acting as the Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) for the UNGASS. Pino Arlacchi, the Executive Director of the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP), used the advertisement's concluding statement in his speech to the PrepCom. He was trying to convince the attending member states' delegations to adopt his **Strategy for Coca and Opium Poppy Elimination** (SCOPE), a plan to eliminate the illicit cultivation of coca bush and opium poppy by 2008.

In 60 seconds the advert turns the UN's 'balanced approach' to drugs control into an attempt to rally

support for a 'War on Drugs'. Although the UNDCP usually avoids using controversial military metaphors in articulating its anti-drugs strategies, Arlacchi invoked such images at a press conference to mark the end of the PrepCom. "The 'war on drugs' has not been fought and lost," he said, "it has never started." According to the UNDCP, SCOPE's innovative world-wide approach will bring new confidence and resolve to efforts to root out the drugs problem.

In his opening speech to the PrepCom, Arlacchi urged the delegations to adopt a strong political declaration and ensure matching resources for the new strategy. He also implored member states to send their governments' leaders to UNGASS. Many heads of state and ministers will attend the Special Session, but this will politicise the debate. Where drugs issues are concerned, this is generally a disadvantage. There is a growing gap between the drug experts, many of whom recognise the deficiencies of current drugs-control strategies, and politicians, who's fear of looking 'soft on drugs' is paralysing genuine debate. Conventional wisdom amongst politicians seems to be that force and repression have not worked because not enough has been applied. The logical response, therefore, is escalation - not re-evaluation.

Given the UN's commitment to a balanced approach to the problem of drugs, SCOPE clearly requires close scrutiny. The viability of its target dates, the effectiveness of the methods it proposes, and its likely impact on developing countries all need to be considered. Of particular concern is the coherence of such a strategy with development and human rights objectives. This paper looks in-depth at the UNDCP's proposed strategy, and, light of past experience, asks whether or not it is viable.

The Road to UNGASS

The original impetus for convening a global meeting on drugs came from Mexican government, which in 1993, proposed a Summit in the vein of the Rio Earth Summit. The idea was to facilitate a world-wide debate on the efficiency and viability of anti-drug strategies used over the past decade, and to develop improved strategies for the next century. After much deliberation and disagreement, the Mexican proposal has since been watered down to a UN Special Session which, ten years after the adoption of the 1988 UN Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, will focus on how to strengthen and expand current drugs control policies.

In November 1996, the UN General Assembly formally decided to convene a Special Session, which would "be devoted to assessing the existing situation within the framework of a comprehensive and balanced approach that includes all aspects of the problem, with a view to strengthening international cooperation to address the problem of illicit drugs." It assigned the task of preparing the session to the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, based in Vienna, Austria. Acting as the preparatory body for the UNGASS, the Commission has met five times over the past year.

The first of many conflicts in the run-up to UNGASS took place in Vienna in March 1997. At issue was the question of which country would hold the Presidency during the preparatory process. Mexico had high hopes of gaining the position and its candidacy was supported by all the Latin American delegations. However, the US, concerned about widespread corruption in Mexican counter-drug agencies, blocked Mexico's candidacy. Just one month previously, in February 1997, the Mexican 'anti-drug Czar' general Gutiérrez Rebollo was forced to resign over allegations that he protected Amado Carrillo Fuentes, the most powerful Mexican drug baron. (1) It took several hours of hard bargaining behind-the-scenes before a compromise was found in a Portuguese presidency. Officially, Mexico voluntarily withdrew its candidacy, but Portuguese officials admit privately that withdrawal was a pre-requisite to their take-over.

Another battle lost at the first PrepCom meeting was over the proposal for an independent evaluation of the efficacy of existing drugs-control conventions. The idea was to commission independent experts to develop new strategies for the next century. The US, Great Britain and some other countries objected. In the end, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan appointed 13 "high-level experts" in March this year to "undertake a comprehensive review of how the efforts against illicit drugs have evolved within the United Nations System". In fact, most of the 'experts' are members of the governing board of the PrepCom itself. "The main aim of their work will be to recommend how to strengthen future international cooperation against illicit drugs, and to identify measures aimed at reinforcing UNDCP's activities in the field of drug control." (2) Independent evaluation is nowhere to be found.

When the agenda-setting for UNGASS started back in 1997, several delegations - many of them from developing countries - stressed that the upcoming global event should mark the end of the 'era of finger-pointing' in drugs policy. The old dichotomy between producer and consumer countries should give way, and the principle of 'shared responsibility' should become cornerstone of international drugs control. These delegations wanted the agenda to, first, reflect a balanced approach that tackled all aspects of the drug problem, and second, to focus on areas which receive little attention in existing conventions.

The finalised agenda does reflect these demands. Many documents approved by the PrepCom for presentation to the UNGASS emphasise the responsibility of the western world to, among other things, reduce demand, control the use of chemical precursors and amphetamines, and tackle money laundering.

The documents which will be presented to the UN General Assembly are:

- a "Political Declaration", to reaffirm and strengthen the international community's commitment to combatting drugs;
- a document outlining the "Guiding Principles on Drug Demand Reduction". This will constitute "the very first international agreement whose sole objective is to examine the problems, both individually and collectively, that arise because a person might or does abuse drugs";
- an "Action Plan against Manufacture, Trafficking and Abuse of Amphetamine-type Stimulants" (ATS), such as XTC and speed;
- "Control of Precursors", which contains measures to improve international control of chemicals used in illegal drug manufacture;
- "Measures to Promote International Judicial Cooperation", such as extradition, mutual legal assistance, transfer of proceedings, etc.;
- "Countering Money-Laundering", a document that reaffirms international commitment to the 1988 Convention provisions on proceeds of crime, and establishes principles upon which further anti-money laundering measures should be based;
- an "Action Plan on International Cooperation on Eradication of Illicit Drug Crops and on Alternative Development".

The global nature of the proposals put forward, the call for a balanced approach between supply and demand, and the emphasis placed on co-responsibility, all mean that both developed and developing countries will be affected by the outcome of the UNGASS. Even so, it is clear from the proposals on alternative development and the eradication of illicit drugs-linked crops that a particular burden is being placed on the so-called producers - i.e. developing countries.

"Unbalanced Approach"

Criticism was expressed during the PrepCom that discussions were focussing too heavily on the supply side of drugs control. Even though the strong emphasis placed on reducing demand, through the "Guiding Principles on Demand Reduction" document, was considered a major achievement, many delegations were not convinced.

In a move designed to confront the developed, consumer countries with the principle of co-responsibility, Mexico proposed that 2003 be included in the "Political Declaration" as a target date for demand reduction. The proposal was accepted in a diluted form - 2003 is now the target date for "new and enhanced drug demand reduction strategies" and there is a commitment "to achieve significant and measurable results" by the year 2008.

Even so, no strategic plan specifically addressing demand reduction was prepared for the PrepCom, as was the case with SCOPE which primarily addresses supply reduction. Demand reduction is not a substantial element of SCOPE - only 2 per cent of the budget is allocated to it. Despite its call for a "balanced approach addressing simultaneously the supply of and the demand for illicit drugs", SCOPE is clearly more concerned with the eradication of narcotic substances, than the demand for them.

Eradication of Drugs-linked Crops and Alternative Development

At the UNGASS, there will be three elements to the discussion of alternative development - which, in the view of the UN, should always be twinned with the eradication of drugs-linked crops. The "Political Declaration" lays the groundwork, defining the concerns, will and intentions of the international community and advocating specific actions to be taken on all issues. The "Action Plan on International Cooperation on Eradication of Illicit Drug Crops and on Alternative Development" (hereafter referred to as the Action Plan) outlines the guidelines for taking this issue forward. Finally, SCOPE attempts to outline a strategy for practical implementation.

"Political Ideals"

The Action Plan defines alternative development as:

A process to prevent and eliminate the illicit cultivation of plants containing narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances through specifically designed rural development measures in the context of sustained national economic growth and sustainable development efforts in countries taking action against drugs, recognizing the particular socio-cultural characteristics of the target communities and groups, within the framework of a comprehensive and permanent solution to the problem of illicit drugs. (3)

It also stresses "The need for a balanced approach to confront high levels of illicit cultivation" and calls on states to develop national strategies which include alternative development, law enforcement and eradication. It recognises alternative development as "one of the key components of the policy and

programmes for reducing illicit drug production," and, in the case of low-income peasant farmers, it argues that alternative development is "more sustainable and socially and economically more appropriate than forced eradication", albeit when imbedded in "comprehensive measures" including law enforcement and eradication.

Throughout the Political Declaration and Action Plan, reference is made to the need to: respect human rights and cultural diversity; promote democratic values; safeguard the environment; respect national sovereignty; and encourage the participation of producers in developing and implementing alternative development projects. But nowhere are these conditions mentioned explicitly as the sine qua non for alternative development and its inevitable twin, crop-eradication.

The UNDCP's reputation on these matters is not undisputed. In the past, alternative development programs focussing on crop substitution have simply failed. Moreover, in many drug-producing countries there has been a complete breach of trust between UNDCP-staff and peasant organisations and NGOs (non-governmental organisations). Complaints concern the lack of participation of local people in the identification, preparation, implementation and evaluation of projects; the often excessive salaries of UNDCP staff; insufficient knowledge of local circumstances in drug-cultivation areas; tacit acceptance of violent law-enforcement measures and human rights violations which frequently accompany counter-narcotic operations.

"Economic Realities"

While still linked to eliminating drugs-linked crops, alternative development programmes are moving away from crop substitution towards more integrated approach, which considers all rural development, including health care and education. The Action Plan, under the heading "Improved and innovative approaches to alternative development", describes it as:

An important component of a balanced and comprehensive drug control strategy and is intended to create a supportive environment for the implementation of that strategy. It is intended to promote lawful and sustainable socio-economic options for these communities and population groups that have resorted to illicit cultivation as their only viable means of obtaining a livelihood, contributing in an integrated way to the eradication of poverty.

In another chapter, "Strengthening of international co-operation for alternative development", there is an allusion to promoting "greater access to domestic and international markets for alternative development products, with a view to overcoming problems relating to prices and marketing" But nowhere is it made clear how this should be done in a global economy in which trade regimes are being increasingly liberalised, and the price of possible alternative products is likely to be unstable.

Free trade agreements could give alternative products better access to US and European markets, but they cannot guarantee prices that could compete with drugs-linked crops. Indeed, in the 1980's regulatory instruments designed to secure higher and stable world-market prices for agricultural products and raw materials collapsed under the pressure of free trade doctrines, causing increased dependency on drugs-linked crops.

An international drugs-control policy also needs to address fluctuations in commodity prices. In 1985, the "International Tin Council" (ITC) disintegrated, leading to a virtual breakdown of the Bolivian economy. As a result, thousands of jobless tin-miners migrated to the sub-tropical Chapare region and started growing coca to survive. Similarly, many peasants turned from coffee to coca cultivation when coffee-prices plunged following the collapse of the "International Coffee Agreement" in 1989. The fall in prices seriously disrupted alternative development projects aimed at persuading coca farmers to grow coffee. (4) More recently, coffee prices slumped from a high of \$267 per quintal (100 kgms) in 1997 to \$187 per quintal today, and are expected to fall to \$110 per quintal in 1999. This is a serious problem in Peru, where coffee is one of the crops chosen as a substitute for coca cultivation. (5)

Regulatory instruments - notwithstanding their deficiencies - could secure competitive prices for non drugs-linked crops. But, as they are contrary to the current free trade ideology, they are not considered. No attempt has been made to initiate a 'fair trade strategy' to counter drug cultivation, nor is one likely in the foreseeable future.

SCOPE

"Initial Reactions to the Plan"

The third element in discussions of alternative development at the UNGASS is the controversial "Strategy for Coca and Opium Poppy Elimination" - SCOPE.

Member states were asked to recommend that the UNGASS endorse UNDCP's initiative in developing and implementing SCOPE by making reference to it in either the Action Plan, or the Political Declaration. To this end, member state delegations were presented with a summary version of SCOPE during the PrepCom (a 170-page draft version was also made available informally). The move

backfired. Delegates were suspicious of the plan, which they received without advance warning, and opposition to it soon developed. Mention of SCOPE was then removed from the draft Action Plan. During a plenary session on the draft Political Declaration - which also mentions the 2008 elimination target date - the Dutch delegation diplomatically called for "feasible goals" both "in substance and target dates" and added that "quantitative benchmarks should not be an end in itself (sic)". In diplomatic language, this is strong criticism.

It soon became clear that SCOPE would not be discussed by the PrepCom in Vienna. Towards the end of the meeting however, Arlacchi called a press conference. In an effort to keep SCOPE on the UNGASS agenda, he told journalists that though the strategy itself had not been discussed in detail, several action plans drafted during the week had all, more or less, endorsed its proposals.

In the end, UNDCP got its way. The final draft of the Political Declaration - approved on an additional day of negotiations - calls on UN member states to "strongly support" the work of the UNDCP in the field of alternative development, and to "emphasize the need for eradication programmes and law enforcement measures to counter illicit cultivation". Moreover, the declaration calls on member states to "welcome" the UNDCP's global approach to the elimination of illicit crops and to "commit" to working closely with the UNDCP "to develop strategies with a view to eliminating or significantly reducing the illicit cultivation of the coca bush, the cannabis plant and the opium poppy by 2008."

"Eradication" was changed to "eliminate or significantly reduce" at the suggestion of the Latin-American group of member states (GRULAC). Cannabis was included at the request of Nigeria, where there is no coca or opium cultivation. Nigeria considers cannabis to be an "extremely dangerous drug" and Western observers believe it wanted to ensure it was not left out when funds for alternative development were disbursed.

SCOPE does have its supporters though. "US contributions to the UNDCP have had significant impact on the operations and expansion of UN counternarcotics programs and policy," the US State Department's "International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 1997" states bluntly. The US was the first to introduce the year 2008 as a target date for crop eradication, asking that member states "commit to ending all illicit cultivation of opium poppy and coca bush...using all available means, including alternative development, eradication and law enforcement." (6) It is interesting to note that this approach was not a part of the UNDCP's original plans.

Although Arlacchi did not manage to get SCOPE mentioned in any of the PrepCom declarations, he did get its endorsement for a go-ahead. Insiders say the UNDCP is still lobbying to get SCOPE on the UNGASS agenda. Even if these attempts fail, a programme something like SCOPE is likely to emerge, either at UNGASS or in the near future.

"What Does SCOPE Propose?"

According to the plan presented in Vienna, SCOPE's main objective is worldwide elimination of the illicit cultivation of the coca bush and opium poppy by the year 2008. The strategy calls for a balanced approach between law enforcement, alternative development and demand reduction, to rid the world of "the scourge of heroin and cocaine". The bulk of SCOPE's almost \$4 billion budget, 74 per cent, is earmarked for alternative development. Law enforcement is allocated 20 per cent and demand reduction 2 per cent. As the UNDCP does not have access to funds of this size, it is appealing to the international community to provide the necessary resources for SCOPE. (7)

SCOPE focuses on eight key countries in three regions: Bolivia, Colombia and Peru in Latin America; the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar (Burma) and Vietnam in South-East Asia; and Afghanistan and Pakistan in South-West Asia. The strategy argues that as the bulk of illicit opiates and coca derivatives originate in a "limited number of well-defined geographical areas" it will be easier to eliminate them by focusing on these areas.

SCOPE's second main argument is that:

After three decades of experience, the international community is now equipped with tested methodologies and the know-how to tackle the problem in the producing areas. The strengthening of the drug-control mechanisms in the regions concerned has paved the way for full-scale interventions and most producing countries have adopted well-defined national strategies and action plans that are ready for implementation. At the same time, it is possible to monitor the areas at risk in order to prevent the 'balloon effect' from nullifying the overall impact of elimination programmes.

The 'balloon effect' is the movement of drugs cultivators to previously untouched areas to escape enforcement measures. (If one part of a balloon is squeezed, the air simply moves to another part and the total amount of air is not reduced).

The third and final argument is that "There is no alternative to concerted and comprehensive action.[...] Clear political will and the adoption of a common agenda on the part of the international community" is

essential. The UNGASS "offers an historic opportunity for all positive forces to converge", according to the UNDCP.

"SCOPE - A Closer Look"

The UNDCP has already set the Strategy in motion by encouraging countries to develop similar drugs-control plans. Afghanistan, for example, has a plan with a 10-year time frame, while Bolivia's \$952 million plan, "With Dignity!" proposes that "the country should come out of the coca-cocaine circuit in the next five years", that is, by 2002. (8) "With Dignity!"'s allocation of funds to alternative development, law enforcement (eradication and interdiction) and demand reduction (prevention and rehabilitation), is also very similar to SCOPE's 70-20-2 model.

A closer look at the 170-page draft of SCOPE reveals flaws which are not obvious in the summary presented at the PrepCom. The plan mentions three ideal conditions for alternative development:

1. Effective control of the drugs cultivation area by central government and an absence of counter-pressure from insurgent groups;
2. An enabling economic environment at the national and international level which makes illicit cultivation less attractive;
3. Consistently applied disincentives to cultivation through law enforcement and eradication.

A large part of SCOPE focuses on the third condition, eradication, and on countering the balloon effect. The strategies suggested are militaristic: development of satellite reconnaissance; rapid assessment teams (RAT's) to monitor displacement of drugs-linked crops; and the research and development of biological and chemical weapons for "environmentally safe" eradication. The underlying message is that, since drugs-linked crop cultivation has been reduced to a well-defined pocket of production areas, containment is possible and one final, massive offensive could eliminate the problem once and for all.

SCOPE's first condition - effective control of the area by central government and an absence of counter-pressure from insurgent groups - is also the primary obstacle to its successful implementation. Governments in some of the major heroin and cocaine producing countries do not have effective control of large parts of their territory. Afghanistan - the world's largest illicit producer of opium and one of SCOPE's key targets - is embroiled in a prolonged civil war. The UNDCP recently reached an agreement with one of the warring parties, the Taliban (which currently controls two-thirds of country) yet the UN does not even recognize the Taliban as a legitimate authority. The official Afghan delegation to the PrepCom, which belonged to the opposing faction, and protested at the UNDCP deal with Taliban. The agency runs the risk of being used by the warring factions in the fight for international recognition, and of jeopardising its drugs-control efforts.

The US is very sceptical about any meaningful progress in counternarcotics with the Taliban, despite the UNDCP's November 1997 deal. The US State Department accuses the Taliban, which controls 96 per cent of Afghanistan's opium growing areas, of "inaction and lack of political will" and points to "substantial drug trade involvement on the part of some local Taliban authorities". (9) Narcotics remain Afghanistan's largest source of income. Taliban authorities reportedly benefit financially from the trade and provide protection to heroin laboratories.

A similar situation has arisen in Burma, where the UNDCP is helping the Government to draft a 10-year drug control programme which aims to eliminate illicit poppy cultivation by 2008. A Western diplomat recently dismissed the plan: "What this government wants to do is perpetuate itself in power. They know they've got a bad image. They looked at drugs and found this is they one issue they [can use] to improve their image and try to get sanctions lifted." (10) According to the US State Department, the regime's highest priority is to defeat the rebel army in the north which, notably, controls Burma's opium trade. Counter-narcotics programmes are of secondary importance.(11)

"Aerial Eradication - Focus on Colombia"

Colombia is another country where the government does not have effective control over all its territory. Large regions of Colombia are in the hands of FARC guerrillas, who levy taxes on the cultivation and marketing of coca leaves and coca paste. The situation is complicated by the growing influence of paramilitary forces - allegedly backed by the Colombian army - which fight the rebels, and have excellent links with drug trafficking syndicates.

Counter-narcotics operations in Colombia consist primarily of chemical fumigation. In 1997, 48,000 hectares of coca and poppy crops were eliminated through the aerial spraying of herbicides. Nevertheless, according to the United States, which monitors drugs-linked crop activity by satellite, the total area under cultivation expanded by 10 per cent in the same year. (12) Growers simply moved to other areas. It is not difficult to imagine what will happen next year: new fields will be sprayed and coca-cultivation -which in itself is not environmentally friendly - will again move on. This vicious circle will contaminate ever-increasing areas of land.

There is grave concern about the long-term environmental impact of massive chemical-spraying in the vulnerable ecosystem of Colombia's Amazon rainforest, where coca cultivation is concentrated. Moreover, spraying is causing health problems among peasants and their livestock, and is contaminating food crops. The Guaviare region in eastern Colombia and other coca-growing regions of the country were the scene of widespread social protest in the summer of 1996. An estimated 241,000 people participated in marches - among the largest peasant mobilisations in Colombian history - to protest against aerial eradication, lack of government support for economic development, and the increasing presence of the Colombian military in the area.

In the violence that ensued, 12 people died in extrajudicial executions and seven disappeared. A number of protest leaders subsequently received death threats and seven were killed, apparently for their involvement in the protests. (13) Clearly, the counter-narcotics strategy of the Colombian government does not comply with the guiding principles set out by the PrepCom on alternative development and eradication: respect for human rights, environmentally safe eradication and participation of local communities.

Although spraying has not been successful in reducing net coca cultivation in Colombia, it is likely to continue. "It's ironic and disturbing that the one country where you have massive aerial eradication is the one where you've got an increase in coca production," says Coletta Youngers of the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA). "There's something fundamentally wrong there." (14)

The liquid herbicide currently being used in spraying operations, glyphosate, is not considered to be effective, so a new, granular herbicide is under consideration: tebuthiuron - better known by its trade name, Spike 20P. Colombia's environment minister Eduardo Verano de la Rosa advised against tebuthiuron in 1994, saying it might damage forests and contaminate ground water. "If everything we've analysed so far is true, and this has to be proven scientifically, our forests, our massive Amazon forests, could basically be converted into prairies," he said.

The minister has refused to allow a field test of tebuthiuron, but he is likely to be overruled by a powerful anti-drugs lobby, which includes the police chief, General Rosso José Serrano, and members of the National Drugs Council. Ivonne Alcalá, head of the Colombian anti-drug office, dismisses concerns about the test. "If we were spraying holy water, they would say the holy water is causing birth defects," she said. (15) Yet even tebuthiuron's manufacturer, Dow Agrosciences, is reluctant to see it used. The product label reads:

Do not apply Spike 20P near desirable trees or other woody species. Exposure of even a small part of a plant root system may cause severe plant injury or death.

Dow says it is "very risky" to apply tebuthiuron "where the terrain slopes, rainfall is significant [...] and the application is made under less-than-ideal circumstances". (16) This is an accurate description of the areas in Colombia where most of the coca and poppy is grown.

The UNDCP does not currently support fumigation projects in Colombia or elsewhere (typically, the United States provides financial and technical assistance). But it does not oppose them either. In discussing the future Colombian national drugs-control strategy, however, the UNDCP has endorsed forced eradication by aerial spraying, with the proviso that it "should focus on commercial cultivation instead of the present indiscriminate fumigations". Concerns remain as to who will determine where subsistence cultivation ends and commercial cultivation begins. Furthermore, such methods seem to contravene the Action Plan's guidelines that "eradication efforts should utilise available research and ensure that environmentally safe methods are employed."

SCOPE reflects the UNDCP's increasing willingness to sanction the use of chemical and/or biological 'weapons', provided they are 'environmentally safe', to counter drugs-linked crop cultivation. SCOPE notes: "as the plan progresses, the importance of eradication will grow," both to stop cultivation in new areas and to prevent its resurgence in areas where alternative development has been implemented. The development of biological or chemical agents can help to complement "tedious manual eradication", it suggests.

Chemical and biological weapons are also being used in combination with sophisticated reconnaissance satellite systems and RATs to counter the balloon effect. "In areas where viable alternative sources of income already exist, law enforcement measures are required against persistent illicit cultivation", says the Action Plan. It remains unclear, however, what criteria are being applied to determine whether law enforcement measures or alternative development are necessary in a given situation.

The use of chemical and biological agents is not restricted solely to aerial fumigation in Colombia. Under a protocol that allows the UNDCP to conduct environmental impact studies for its programmes, the agency is conducting research on herbicides and biological agents with a view to using these substances in different regions. A research program is currently underway in Uzbekistan which will test

a biological agent based on the pathogenic fungus *Dendryphon papaveraceae*, which destroys the opium poppy. While the potential impact of this programme is yet unknown, the donors financing it insisted on anonymity, which suggests it is likely to be controversial.

"Small Carrot versus big stick"

Colombia's current national drugs-control strategy is described in SCOPE as "based on two distinct, but complementary courses of action: the carrot and the stick". The stick is forced eradication, the carrot, alternative development projects. This approach is reflected in SCOPE's 'balanced approach' guidelines and its 'ideal conditions' for alternative development. The latter calls for "consistently applied disincentives through law enforcement and eradication". The argument being that alternative development programmes are more effective if they are backed by credible eradication measures.

Colombia's carrot, the PLANTE presidential program, entitles small-holders in drugs-linked crop growing regions to technical and financial assistance when they stop cultivating illicit crops. PLANTE only assists campesinos with 100 per cent drugs-free farms. Many farmers have to wait a long time before they are offered assistance, if they are offered it at all, owing to the lack of coordination between PLANTE and the anti-narcotics police. The UNDCP acknowledges that insufficient synchronization between development projects and forced eradication is a major problem in Colombia, and that PLANTE's coverage has been far from complete. The stick is already used with full force, while the carrot has been barely planted.

"But the lack of proportion between the big stick and the small carrot only partly explains why Colombia has failed to stop the spectacular increase in coca acreage," notes SCOPE. Colombia's illicit crop cultivation problem can not be solved in isolation from its internal security problem. The two issues are becoming more inter-twined - guerrillas and paramilitaries are involved in cultivation and first processing stages of the illicit drugs, according to SCOPE. The more the conflict escalates, the more both sides - but especially the paramilitaries - are drawn into the drugs chain.

At the same time, fuelled by US pressure and military assistance, the distinction between counter-narcotics and counter-insurgency operations is becoming increasingly blurred. Alarmed by recent setbacks suffered by the military in its fight against the guerrillas, the Clinton administration might step up its already considerable military assistance to Colombia. (17) If the White House meets Colombia's request for 12 Cobra attack helicopters, the country would be the first in South America to receive sophisticated weapons since President Clinton lifted a ban on such sales last year.

Paramilitary groups - believed to be backed by the Colombian military - committed 46 massacres of 260 peasants last year, according to a report recently presented to the UN Human Rights Commission by the UN Human Rights delegate Almudena Mazarrasa. The conflict forced an average of six families an hour to flee from their homes in 1997, and nearly 1.2 million have been displaced over the past five years. (18)

Despite several peace initiatives, the largest rebel group, FARC, is stepping up its activities. Recently, FARC almost wiped out an elite battalion of the Colombian army. In spite of the overwhelming evidence that the Colombian conflict is escalating, the UNDCP's time-table for drugs-control predicts that the country's peace process will be complete by 1999. Guerrillas will then demobilise and be recruited into counter-narcotics operations, given employment "eradicating by hand illicit cultivation" and helping with "reforestation and protection of national reserves". It remains to be seen how the UNDCP will accomplish in 12 months what years of concerted international effort involving UN agencies, various sectors of civil society, and national governments have not.

"Lessons from Bolivia"

The UNDCP applauds Bolivia's drugs-control master plan for 1998-2002, "With Dignity!", the first plan to adopt the approach recommended by SCOPE. "With Dignity!" is also known as the Plan Banzer as it was approved by President and former military dictator Hugo Banzer in December 1997. Plan Banzer outlines plans for the elimination of all illicit coca grown in the Chapare by the year 2002. This requires the eradication of 38,000 hectares of coca plantations at a pace of 8,000 hectares a year. Newly planted coca crops will be compulsorily destroyed by the DEA-trained (US Drug Enforcement Agency) FELCN (Special Anti-Narcotics Police Force) and 15,000 coca-grower families will be resettled to non coca-growing areas.

Some \$700 million of "With Dignity!"'s \$952 million budget is earmarked for alternative development projects. The Bolivian Government is prepared to finance 15 per cent of the total cost and is appealing to the international community to provide the rest. The Chapare coca growers say that, as long as alternative sources of income are not available, they will carry on growing coca. Alternative development programs such as those suggested by "With Dignity!" have been notoriously slow to bear fruit in Bolivia. Indeed, they have often failed completely. (19) One effect of this situation has been an erosion of confidence in the Bolivian government's proposals. This is reflected by a 1994 opinion poll,

which found that 77 per cent of the Chapare coca-farmers had no confidence in alternative development projects. (20)

Evo Morales, the coca-growers' most outspoken leader - and a member of Bolivian parliament for the Chapare region - has said that his members will never permit complete coca eradication. He also complains that the government did not consult growers about "With Dignity!", although the government claims it began a lengthy consultation process after President Banzer took office in August 1997. (21)

The Government says it is determined to ensure that "With Dignity!" is implemented without violence and with the full cooperation of those concerned, but evidence suggests that neither criteria are being met. On April 1, coca farmers protested against the reduction in compensation for voluntary eradication by blocking the roads in the Chapare region. The one-off payment to farmers who voluntarily destroy their coca crops has been reduced from \$2,500 per hectare to \$1,650, and by 2002 no compensation will be offered at all. Instead, money will be used for 'community development' projects which are easier to monitor and supposedly more beneficial to the region than individual payments. Coca-farmers were not consulted when these new policies were drafted and they fear they will have no say in how the community development projects are run.

In response to the road-blocks, 5,000 troops from several different specialised military and police units moved in, and the region became a war zone. Some 120 hectares of coca were forcibly eradicated immediately. Tear gas was used every other day. At least eight campesinos were killed, and more than 100 wounded. As human rights groups could not enter the area, human rights abuses could not be monitored accurately. However, there are reports that 40 farmers disappeared, dozens were detained, and that many more fled to the jungle.

One area, "Villa 14 de Septiembre", was completely surrounded by the military. Human Rights Minister Edgar Montoya, Evo Morales, and another member of Bolivian parliament were all denied access. The latter two have received death threats since. Journalists were also refused entry. The military stated that they were acting under orders to let no one into the zone.

Interior Minister, Guido Náyár, admitted forced eradication operations reached military proportions, but blamed coca growers for the violence and accused them of undermining the Banzer Plan. According to Náyár, "the black hand" of drugs traffickers had organised and funded the demonstrations to protect their cocaine production laboratories in this zone. (22) Today, Chapare remains in a undeclared state of siege. Freedom of movement and of association have been abolished and military police are on continuous patrol.

Coca-producers are already disillusioned with alternative development projects. Many years of confrontation over forced eradication campaigns, coupled with a history of human rights abuses, (23) has made many farmers cynical. The current situation is unlikely to boost their confidence in the government's drugs-control programme.

If "With Dignity!" is regarded as a pilot project for SCOPE, the future does not look promising. While forced eradication is well underway, alternative development projects have barely begun. Moreover, legitimate protests of Bolivian coca growers have been violently suppressed by the government. This is a far cry from participatory approaches based on dialogue called for in the Action Plan.

"The Trickle-down Effect"

The third 'ideal condition' for SCOPE - the provision of an enabling economic environment at national and international levels to make illicit cultivation less attractive - is something far beyond the reach of the UNDCP. The agency cannot guarantee high and stable market prices for alternative products because it has little influence over place price-stabilisation mechanisms and international trade agreements. Nor is it likely to receive support from the international community to reform such mechanisms. Indeed, in the Action Plan, the international community states its preference for "comprehensive law enforcement programmes [that] affect the profitability of illicitly cultivated drug crops and, in doing so, make alternative sources of legal income more competitive and attractive." In short, instead of ensuring stable licit incomes to fight the poverty that has led farmers into illicit drugs-linked crop cultivation, the United Nations would rather reduce their source of income.

To create an "enabling economic environment" SCOPE advocates private sector investment in alternative development. It suggests that "the private sector will have an important role in the form of productive investments in the area of production." These are to be encouraged by governmental measures, such as tax breaks and complementary public investment programmes, as well as preferential trade agreements at the international level. This approach is unlikely to benefit peasant producers. In Bolivia, for instance, Morales warns that Chapare land vacated during the resettlement of some 15,000 coca-growing families to other regions will be turned over to the production of export crops by medium and large scale private-sector companies, bringing little benefit to the peasants.

"With Dignity!" plans for agro-industrial expansion along the lines promoted in SCOPE. Most alternative development products are tradable, it argues, and therefore have to compete in the global economy. This "compels agro-industrial initiatives to be implemented from a medium scale to a large one" by businessees with the expertise and capacity to survive in the international market. To this end, the government proposes a number of exempting measures that will encourage large scale undertakings and investment, including a new tax incentives law. "With Dignity!" forecasts that, within five years, agricultural and livestock production will have increased by at least 70 per cent. (24)

It is not clear how profits from large-scale agricultural industry, or other sectors of the economy expected to benefit from agricultural expansion, will trickle down to the most impoverished sectors of society - those most likely to resort to coca cultivation to survive.

"Sharing the Burden - Financing SCOPE"

The UNDCP suggests that roughly one-third of the financial resources required to implement SCOPE should come from the governments of so-called producer countries, while wealthy countries and international organizations should provide the other two-thirds. Four main options are suggested for funding the national drugs-control programmes under SCOPE: loans; converted debts; grants and government resources.

One option in particular is worth highlighting - special loans granted and managed by international financial institutions such as the World Bank and regional development banks. "Repayment conditions could be determined by performance criteria, the main and most obvious one being that illicit crop cultivation has stopped in the country," SCOPE proposes. "A country that has succeeded in eliminating illicit production would then see its debt totally or partially cancelled, the rest being reimbursed at favourable conditions in the case of partial repayment."

This arrangement would burden so-called producer countries with new debts. To finance their part of the deal, the already debt-ridden developing countries would have to borrow substantially. The UNDCP, acting as a kind of comptroller-general, would help broker loans with preferable interest rates and repayment terms, or even help governments cancel or convert their debts. But this would leave participating governments completely dependent on the UNDCP, which would recommend or oppose new assistance on the basis of their performance eradicating drugs-linked crops. Countries which do not come up to scratch will then be 'punished' with extra debt burdens.

Creating 'Clear Political Will' - the Role of the UNDCP Director

The central role played by the Executive Director of the UNDCP, Pino Arlacchi, in the preparations for the UNGASS cannot be overlooked. He has put himself forward both as the agency's principal spokesperson and as a focal point in the campaign to galvanise support for the UNDCP's global approach to drugs control. Given the highly politicised nature of the UNDCP's approach and the emphasis on generating the political will necessary to meet supply and demand reduction targets, the role of the Executive Director merits greater attention. UN Secretary General Kofi Annan praises the "renowned Italian crime fighter" for bringing vitality and credibility to the UNDCP. Even so, within the UNDCP, the newly-appointed Executive Director is seen as an outsider who overruled critical assessments of SCOPE by the agency's specialists.

Arlacchi played an important and brave role in fighting the Mafia in Italy, but it is not clear that his methods can be readily transferred to his new role. Peasant farmers who cultivate the coca bush and opium poppy are not mafiosi. In the drive to deny organised crime an important source of income, Arlacchi is targeting the weakest link in the drugs chain - the relatively innocent growers of the raw material, those who depend on drugs-linked crops to survive, and who risk losing their livelihoods and lives as the 'war on drugs' escalates.

The Executive Director is used to dealing with such criticism, however. After a critical session on SCOPE at the PrepCom, he simply thanked delegates for their support and dismissed their strong reservations. When European Commissioner Emma Bonino castigated the UNDCP's \$250 million, 10-year agreement with the Taliban because of the organisation's human rights record -specifically its policies of discrimination against women - he discarded her comments as "inter-Italian politicking". Asked about human rights abuses under Taliban rule, Arlacchi responded: "We also champion human rights, to save 8 million heroin addicts."(25) Even so, the agreement with the Taliban could be interpreted as a violation of the gender principle laid down in the Political Declaration, which states that "women and men [should] benefit equally, and without any discrimination, from strategies directed against the world drug problem, through their involvement in all stages of programmes and policy-making".

Arlacchi clearly sees himself as a political catalyst. But in a matter as complex and sensitive as drugs one has to wonder where such political posturing will lead. Generating the political will to implement

drugs-control policies is only worthwhile if the policies themselves are appropriate and effective. To obtain such policies requires leaders who are brave enough to accept criticism and intelligent enough to seek new solutions.

Conclusion

"Words get lost in the translation to actions", Arlacchi told PrepCom delegates in a speech in which he sought their approval for SCOPE. But in the future it is more likely that the phrase will be recalled in association with the strategy's failure to respect human rights, safeguarding the environment, and ensure producers participation. SCOPE's 10-year elimination target will significantly increase the pressure on governments to use repressive measures such as forced crop eradication, as it is highly unlikely that alternative development can achieve the elimination goal in this time frame.

The drugs problem cannot be resolved simply. If there is one lesson to be learned from previous drugs-control efforts, it is that every policy which has been tried, none has succeeded. Forced eradication, alternative development and even demand reduction have had little impact on either the supply or demand of narcotics. With the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, the UN banned cultivation of drugs-linked crops for purposes other than medical and scientific use. Production of opium was to be eradicated with 25 years and coca within 15 years. Those targets have not been reached.

In New York this June, the UNDCP will lobby the UN to adopt a new plan, for the elimination all illicit coca and opium poppy cultivation in ten years. SCOPE is presented as an innovative, global strategy which marks an historic turning point in the fight against drugs. It merges a balanced approach with new technologies such as satellite monitoring and improved chemical and biological counter-drug agents. "There are naysayers who believe a global fight against illegal drugs is unwinnable," Arlacchi told delegates at the PrepCom. "I say they are wrong! Our slogan for the Special Session is 'A Drug Free World - We Can Do It!' And we can do it,". "It will be an historic opportunity for all of us who care so deeply about a future free from the evils of illegal drugs."

Unfortunately, the facts do not fit the rhetoric. "I just returned from a visit to the Andean region two weeks ago," Arlacchi said. "And I met with peasant farmers and local leaders. I talked to people. I can tell you -from the valleys to the cities- they are convinced that the time is coming when illegal drugs are going to be very hard to find." A month later peasant farmers and local leaders in Bolivia set up road blocks to protest the government's elimination strategy, a strategy that the UNDCP supports. Eight have died since.

The UNDCP has set 2008 as the target date to eliminate coca bush and opium poppy cultivation. But the reality is that so-called producer countries are simply not in a position to comply with such directives. More important, the UNDCP's plans pose a serious threat to human rights, the environment, and the continuing participation of producers in developing and implementing alternative development projects. Alternative development is recognised by the UNDCP as an important method of countering drugs-linked cultivation and it will receive the bulk of the SCOPE budget. But past experiences have shown that alternative development is not a miracle medicine. In some cases it has benefited poor producers, but in many others, it has failed or been counterproductive. In Colombia and Bolivia, for instance, UNDCP programs to substitute drugs crops with a foreign coffee bush have proved disastrous, leaving peasants with no income at all.

In Pakistan joint efforts in drug enforcement and alternative development have resulted in cultivation being displaced - extending erosion and deforestation - both within Pakistan and from Pakistan to Afghanistan. A former UNDCP field officer concluded that supply reduction policies in Pakistan were not only ineffective, but also inadvertently promoted use of more dangerous drugs (users shifted from smoking opium to injecting heroin due to bans placed on traditional opium use). (26) When alternative development fails to bring quick results, governments are likely to turn to eradication.

Yet while alternative development has never resulted in the total elimination of drugs-linked crops, neither has interdiction or eradication. According to a World Bank report, (27) former narcotics-producing countries such as Turkey and Thailand were only able to eliminate illicit opium production when socio-economic standards improved independently of drugs-control policies. In both cases, however, world wide opium production was not affected, as it moved from Turkey to Iran and Afghanistan, and from Thailand to Burma.

The report, considered too controversial to be published, estimates that over \$300 million has been poured into alternative development in the Andean countries since 1983. "However, while the amount of alternative crops has, in some cases, expanded so has the production of coca/cocaine," the report says. "Alternative development programs alone cannot raise the relative returns from non-coca crops to a level sufficient to compete with the present high returns from coca." Farmers diversify into new crops, but still retaining coca. They have learned to wait and see if alternative projects work, and if prices for new crops remain stable before abandoning coca-production. Some observers describe this

as 'parallel development' rather than alternative development.

Alternative development can also have "perverse" affects, says the World Bank report. Infrastructure projects such as roads and bridges, designed to give farmers better access to markets also facilitate the transport of coca-paste out of, and the precursors used in first stage production into, remote areas. Finally, crop substitution can be self-defeating, as a reduced supply of coca leaves raises coca prices, making it a more profitable crop to grow.

Past experience shows that alternative development is an enormously complex undertaking which requires long-term vision and investment. In order for socio-economically based strategies to succeed, there must be real commitment to creating the conditions necessary for them to flourish. The emphasis must be on 'development', and people's rights to participate in their own development.

Strategies such as SCOPE fundamentally undermine development processes because they fail to provide realistic time-frames in which non-repressive solutions can be pursued. By failing to articulate clearly the relationship between eradication and alternative development, SCOPE has created a situation in which repression appears to be the only solution. This is what has happened in Bolivia.

SCOPE's main objective is worldwide elimination of the illicit cultivation of coca and opium poppy, and of the production of illicit opiates and coca derivatives, by the year 2008. The UNDCP wants this strategy - and its plan for achieving it, SCOPE - endorsed by the UN General Assembly Special Session in June in New York. The question is: who will bear the brunt of this strategy? In real terms, it is going to be the small-scale producer, the coca-farmers in the Chapare and the opium-growers in Afghanistan. "The front lines are still at grass-roots level," UNDCP-director Arlacchi said to the PrepCom. That is the real danger of SCOPE.

Recommendations

As the United Nations prepares to discuss the issue of drugs in its General Assembly, an International Coalition of NGOs (ICN) has formed to contribute their views to the search for just and effective drugs-control policies. ICN believes that current drugs-control policies are disproportionately affecting the weakest links of the drugs chain - namely drugs consumers, couriers, and rural populations involved in the cultivation of illicit drugs-linked crops. The following recommendations are taken, in part, from ICN's broader analysis of current drugs control policy. (28)

The European Union and UN member states should:

- not endorse SCOPE in its present form, neither politically nor financially
- refrain from using drugs-control target dates that are tied to the elimination of drugs-linked crops
- establish an independent high-level inquiry into the effectiveness and impact of current international drugs-control efforts, including a thorough evaluation, with the direct involvement of those peasant populations affected, of UNDCP alternative development programmes
- encourage non-prosecution of the cultivation of drugs-linked crops by small-scale farmers, and implementation of economic, political and social measures, with the consensual agreement of all sectors concerned, which offer real alternatives to dependence on the cultivation of such plants
- suspend forcible eradication operations and those eradication measures which have negative impacts on the environment and on human health, such as the devastating practice of aerial fumigation using herbicides and defoliants
- de-link military involvement from counter-narcotic efforts, including the demilitarisation of areas of illicit cultivation
- abolish any exceptional drugs control legislation which violates universally agreed legal and processual guarantees

European NGOS should:

- create cross-sectoral alliances among interest groups across Europe, and with groups in developing countries, to build a platform of opinion jointly calling for the re-evaluation of international drugs-control policy while searching for alternative strategies
- research and publish case studies that demonstrate the impact of international drugs-control policy on developing countries, highlighting alternative scenarios in order to stimulate public debate
- lobby the European Union and member-state governments for greater transparency over the use of funds for drugs-control purposes, to ensure their consistency with development and human rights objectives
- call on the European Union and UN member states to conduct an independent high-level evaluation of current international drugs-control policy.

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