



the sunshine project

NEWS RELEASE

www.sunshine-project.org

Colombia Abandons Research on Biological Agents for Drug Eradication

Now all research on anti-coca agents illegal under the Bioweapons Convention

(Hamburg and Austin, 25 January) - Colombia has abandoned a project to develop biological agents to eradicate coca and opium poppy plants, dealing another major defeat to the US-promoted idea to use biological weapons in the Drug War.

Last year, Colombia refused a US-funded United Nations Drug Control Program (UNDCP) proposal to field test fungal pathogens developed by US researchers. But, responding to US pressure, the Colombian government floated a counterproposal to domestically develop biological agents for drug eradication. Like its UNDCP predecessor, the counterproposal was intensely opposed as biological weapons research. Now, Colombian Environment Minister Juan Mayr has abandoned the plan altogether.

Mayr's announcement follows Vienna-based UNDCP's decision to withdraw from all efforts to use biological eradication in the Andes and after former US President Clinton decided to suspend a US Congress-imposed stipulation that Colombia use fungi in drug eradication in order to receive military assistance. Thus, barring a major policy shift in Washington, Bogotá, or Vienna, the Colombian decision is the last and final step that ends any biological eradication projects in the region.

Minister Mayr announced his decision in a January 4, 2001 letter to a prominent Colombian Senator who opposes the project. Mayr wrote that the government has "decided not to continue" the controversial research project, a decision Mayr says was precipitated by UNDCP's November withdrawal (for more information, see Sunshine Project / Acción Andina / Transnational Institute news release of Nov. 13th).

Mayr's decision makes fully evident that biological eradication agents are indeed biological weapons. All further research - anywhere - on biological agents for coca eradication is outlawed by the Bioweapons Convention. Since all countries with illicit coca harvests have now announced their opposition to biological agents, any use of such agents can only be considered a hostile act. Under the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (and US implementing legislation), development of biological agents for non-peaceful purposes is outlawed.

UNDCP, however, is continuing its work on biological agents in Asia. An anti-opium poppy fungus is currently being field tested by an Uzbekistan laboratory that was part of the former Soviet Union's offensive biological weapons program. The continuation of the Asian projects illustrates why a global ban is urgently needed. A global ban on any such agent can be achieved in resolutions by the Conferences of the Parties to the Biological Weapons Convention, the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the Commission on Narcotic Drugs.