



VENEZUELA'S FIGHT AGAINST DRUGS

Advances in the First Semester of 2010

Venezuela is an active and committed partner in the global fight against the production, consumption and trafficking of illegal drugs. **As a neighbor to both the world's largest producer of cocaine and the world's largest consumer of it, Venezuela is constantly striving to more aggressively stop the trafficking and use of illegal drugs.** And though since 2006 the U.S. government has accused Venezuela of not cooperating in the war on drugs in its unilateral reports, the evidence clearly shows the contrary.

DRUG SEIZURES

So far in 2010, Venezuela has seized 33 tons of illegal drugs.¹ In 2009, 60 tons of drugs were seized, an 11 percent increase from the year prior. According to a 2010 report of the U.N. Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Venezuela ranks second in South America, behind only Colombia, in drug seizures.²

Contrary to U.S. government claims, drug seizures increased after a 2005 decision to suspend cooperation with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), after agents were accused of participating in espionage and having links to drug trafficking rings. During 2002-2004, 125 tons of drugs were seized, while 172.8 were seized during 2006-2008, an increase of 47.8 tons, or 38.2 percent.

Furthermore, while U.S. officials have criticized Venezuela for not seizing more of the cocaine being trafficked through its territory, it is well known that interdictions of this sort are rarely able to stop a majority of the drugs moving through a country. According to the Drug Policy Alliance, U.S. authorities successfully interdict only 10 percent to 15 percent of all heroin and 30 percent of all cocaine being trafficked into the U.S.³

ARRESTS AND DEPORTATIONS

Just in the first semester of 2010 Venezuelan authorities captured and deported six important drug traffickers, four of which were deported to

the U.S. All told, so far in 2010, 13 drug kingpins have been captured by Venezuela.

In January 2010, Venezuelan authorities captured Salomon Camacho, who is wanted by the U.S.,⁴ Jean Marie Bonnamy wanted by France, and Oscar Ospino Pacheco wanted by Colombia. On February 2, these individuals were deported to the U.S., France and Colombia, respectively.⁵

During June and July 2010, three key Colombian drug kingpins wanted by the U.S. were arrested – Carlos “Beto” Rentería, Luis Tello, and Carlos Ojeda. Rentería, 65, was once a leader of the powerful Colombian cartel “Norte del Valle” and was one of the most wanted drug traffickers in the world, with a \$5 million reward offered by the U.S. for information leading to his capture. He was detained on July 5 after arriving to Margarita Island, off the northern coast of Venezuela. Ojeda, wanted in the U.S. for heroin trafficking, was arrested on June 2, while Tello, linked to the Mexican cartel “Los Zetas,” was arrested on June 24. The three were deported to the U.S. on July 13.⁶

After the July deportation of the three Colombian drug traffickers, even the U.S. Embassy in Caracas recognized the work of the Venezuelan police and qualified the operation and final deportation as “positive.”⁷

In 2009, 8,727 individuals were detained for crimes related to the trafficking of illegal drugs. Amongst those were 14 priority suspects – such as the leaders or lieutenants in drug trafficking rings – sought by other countries. Due to the extensive cooperation that exists between Venezuela and other countries on combating drug trafficking, 20 foreign nationals were deported through August 2009.⁸ Of those, 10 were Colombians.⁹

MONITORING OF DRUG ROUTES

Through 2008 and 2009 Venezuela completed the installation of 10 Chinese-made radar stations to track and intercept planes carrying illegal drugs.¹⁰ The investment in the radars totaled \$260 million.



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In January 2010, two U.S. planes used for drug trafficking were seized by Venezuelan authorities.¹¹ **In February, authorities seized 28 more planes used for the trafficking of drugs.**¹² During the first months of 2009, 25 planes were seized.¹³

In addition to monitoring airspace, Venezuelan authorities have taken action against illicit landing strips in isolated areas used by small planes carrying drugs. Over 223 of these landing strips were destroyed in 2008.¹⁴ In 2009, two significant operations led to the destruction of 48 additional illegal landing strips.

USE OF DRUG INCINERATORS

In July 2009 the Venezuelan government began using special drug incinerators to dispose of seized drugs. The incinerators employ advanced technology to limit the production of toxic fumes caused by the burning of illegal drugs and have been approved for use by the World Health Organization (WHO).¹⁵

“Venezuela is the first country in the world with an expanded capacity of incinerators for illegal drugs,” according to the Ministry of Interior and Justice.¹⁶ Each incinerator can destroy 125 kilograms (275 pounds) of drugs every hour.

Five of the 10 planned incinerators are currently in use, with the newest having been inaugurated on February 19, 2010 on the island-state of Nueva Esparta. On that day, 700 kilograms (1,540 pounds) of marijuana were incinerated.¹⁷

BORDER AREAS

Given that Colombia produces the majority of the world’s cocaine and shares a long border with Venezuela, the Venezuelan government has focused efforts on combating cultivation and production along the border.

During the first week of July 2010, 1,800 officials of all the branches of the Venezuelan Armed Forces participated in Operation Sierra, during which they inspected about 25,000 km² along the shared border between Colombia and Venezuela. Starting and finishing with the border town of Río de Oro, it was confirmed that for the fifth consecutive year,

no illegal cocaine cultivations existed on Venezuela’s side of the shared border.¹⁸

OTHER MEASURES

In 2009, \$195 million worth of assets were seized during the course of drug investigations. Those assets included businesses, farms and cars.¹⁹ In 2009 more than 12,000 tons of precursor chemicals – the chemicals used to purify or refine the raw materials of illegal drugs – were seized by Venezuelan authorities. Additionally, more than 400 businesses have been investigated for crimes related to the distribution or storage of precursor chemicals.²⁰

COMPREHENSIVE EFFORTS

Venezuela believes in a comprehensive approach to fighting drugs, one which emphasizes not just interdiction but also prevention and treatment for those that become addicted to illegal drugs.

In 2009, Venezuela’s National Anti-Drug Office (ONA), which is part of the Ministry of Interior and Justice, oversaw hundreds of workshops aimed at preventing drug use. Over the course of the year, these workshops helped train 100,000 community members to serve as local “prevention advisors.” **By 2013, it is estimated that five million Venezuelans will have been trained as prevention advisors.**

As part of Venezuela’s comprehensive anti-drug efforts, in September 2009 the ONA announced the creation of a National Anti-Drug Fund to help finance drug prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and social integration programs throughout Venezuela.²¹ The fund became active in January 2010.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION & PRAISE

During a July 2010 visit to Venezuela, Abdessalam Ali Treki, the president of the UN General Assembly, recognized Venezuela’s efforts in the fight against drugs. “Last week there was a meeting at the UN in which was discussed the issue of combating drug trafficking and organized crime. Positive results have been presented. Drugs have become a threat in the world. The world must unite to eradicate this problem. I welcome the efforts being undertaken by Venezuela in the fight against this problem,” he said.²²



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In the international context, Venezuela believes in shared responsibility in the fight against illegal drugs. As different countries play different roles – Colombia as a producer country, Venezuela as a transit point and the U.S. as a consumer – each country needs to work with the others to craft a comprehensive and effective international anti-drug strategy.

In August and September of 2008, Venezuela engaged in joint exercises with the militaries of Brazil and the Netherlands to improve monitoring of airspace and the Caribbean.²³ Moreover, Venezuela has 50 anti-drug cooperation accords with 38 countries, including Spain, France and Portugal. It also cooperates with other regional partners and takes part in the OAS's Inter-American Commission for the Control of Drug Abuse (CICAD).

In late September 2009, Venezuela hosted the XIX Summit of the Heads of National Law Enforcement Agencies, which was attended by 120 delegates from 40 countries. During that summit a representative from the UN's Commission on Narcotic Drugs recognized Venezuela as one of the leading countries in drug seizures in Latin America.²⁴

COOPERATION WITH THE U.S.

In 2005, Venezuela suspended cooperation with the U.S. over accusations that DEA agents engaged in espionage and had been compromised by drug rings. Despite evidence that Venezuela has been successfully fighting drug trafficking, the Bush administration started to discredit Venezuela in the fight against drugs after the suspension of the agreement. Unfortunately, the Obama Administration has opted to continue the Bush administration's politicization of the fight against drugs.

In a July 2008 meeting with U.S. Ambassador Patrick Duddy to Venezuela, President Chávez indicated that Venezuela and the United States have to cooperate again "to fight against drug trafficking and international crime."²⁵ President Chávez has communicated this message many times to members of the U.S. House of Representatives that have visited the country and met with him in the last years. However, this is not possible while U.S. officials continue inflammatory comments and unfounded accusations against Venezuela.

Nevertheless, Venezuela will continue its strategy in the fight against drugs, which is focused on strengthening national anti-drug capacity and includes cooperation with the international community. Moreover, the government of Venezuela still hopes for consistent U.S. engagement in the fight against this scourge.

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