



Context Paper

Venezuela's Fight Against Drug Trafficking

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

In 2009, Venezuela seized 60 tons of illegal drugs, an 11 percent increase from the 54 tons seized in 2008. Of the total seized, 53 percent was marijuana and 46 percent was cocaine.¹ **According to a 2009 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.**

- U.S. government attempts to discredit the Venezuelan fight against drugs are politically motivated.
- Contrary to U.S. government claims, drug seizures increased after a 2005 decision to suspend cooperation with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA).
- Venezuela's has adopted a comprehensive anti-drug strategy that includes prevention, drug seizures, arrests and deportations of criminals, destruction of clandestine airstrips and the monitoring of possible drug routes.
- Venezuela has cooperative anti-drug agreements with 38 countries, including France, Spain and Portugal.

Additionally, considering how illegal drugs are trafficked out of Colombia, U.S. claims that Venezuela serves as a principal conduit for drug trafficking do not hold water. **The 2009 UNODC report found that in 2007, 70 percent of the 600 tons of cocaine produced in Colombia were transported out of the country by way of the Pacific Ocean.**⁴ Venezuela doesn't have a Pacific coastline. "This fact throws out the theory that the majority of the drugs produced in Colombia are trafficked

through Venezuela," explained Coronel Néstor Reverol, head of Venezuela's National Anti-Drug Office (ONA).⁵

The 2009 UNODC report stated, "Only 20 percent of the cocaine produced in Colombia is trafficked out through the eastern Caribbean route."⁶ If one were to assume that the entire 20 percent going through the eastern Caribbean made its way through Venezuela, which is not likely, then the percentage of

cocaine seized by Venezuela in 2007 (31 tons, or 26 percent of Colombia's total) would almost exactly match the U.S.'s success in interdiction – and the U.S. is a global superpower and is the largest consumer of drugs in the world.

The Fight Against Drugs in 2009...

- Seizures of drugs increased from 54 to 60 tons
- \$260 million spent on radars to detect drug flights
- 8,727 people detained for drug crimes
- 26 drug laboratories destroyed
- 50 anti-drug international cooperation agreements
- 12,000 tons of precursor chemicals seized



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ARRESTS AND DEPORTATIONS

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. Of those, 10 were Colombians.

In January 2010, Venezuelan authorities captured three important drug traffickers: Salomon Camacho, who is wanted by the U.S., Jean Marie Bonnamy wanted by France, and Oscar Ospino Pacheco wanted by Colombia for being a member of a right-wing paramilitary group. On February 2, these individuals were deported to the U.S., France, and Colombia, respectively.

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. The investment in the radars totaled \$260 million.

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

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. In 2009, two significant operations led to the destruction of 48 additional illegal landing strips.

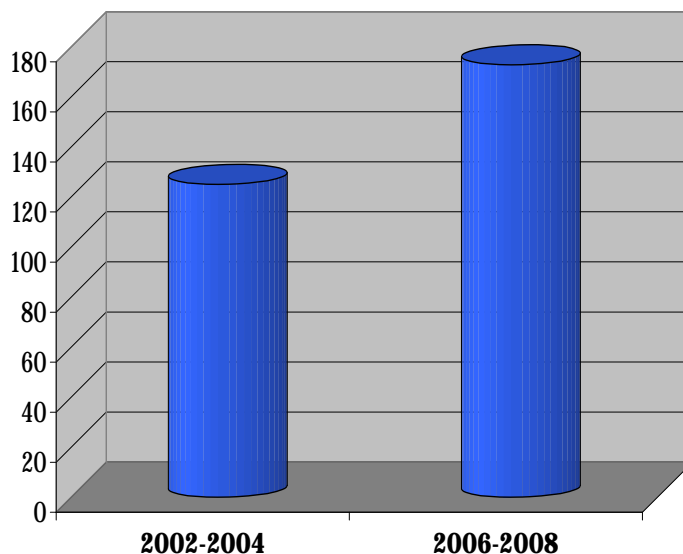
USE OF DRUG INCINERATORS

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).

“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. 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.

Average Drug Seizures (Tons)



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. In 2009, the fourth annual military operation

known as “Sierra” did away with areas along the Venezuelan side of the border that had been cultivated with illegal drugs. Other operations led to the destruction of 26 drug laboratories in the same areas.



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SEIZED ASSETS

In 2009, \$195 million worth of assets were seized during the course of drug investigations. Those assets included businesses, farms and cars.²⁰

PRECURSOR CHEMICALS

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.²¹

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.²² The fund became active in January 2010.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

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

INTERNATIONAL PRAISE

Through CICAD, the OAS has recognized Venezuela's efforts in implementing the 2002-2007 National Anti-Drug Plan.²⁵ Interpol has also praised Venezuela's actions in the fight against drugs.²⁶

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 to Venezuela, Patrick Duddy, President Chávez indicated that Venezuela and the United States have to cooperate again "to fight against drug trafficking and international crime."²⁷ 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 three years. However, this is not possible while U.S. officials continue inflammatory



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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.

February 22, 2010.

For more detailed information about Venezuela's fight against drug trafficking, please read our context paper at: <http://www.venezuela-us.org/>

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³ Drug Policy Alliance Network <http://www.drugpolicy.org/global/drugpolicyby/latinamerica/>

⁴ "Reporte Mundial de las Drogas de la Oficina de las Naciones Unidas contra la Droga y el Delito (2009)", http://www.unodc.org/documents/wdr/WDR_2009/Seizures_Tables.pdf

⁵ "No es cualquier cosa lo que hemos logrado en materia de lucha antidrogas", Agencia Bolivariana de Noticias, 21 de julio de 2009, <http://www.abn.info.ve/noticia.php?articulo=191752&lee=1>

⁶ "No es cualquier cosa lo que hemos logrado en materia de lucha antidrogas", Agencia Bolivariana de Noticias, 21 de julio de 2009, <http://www.abn.info.ve/noticia.php?articulo=191752&lee=1>

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⁹ "Venezuela arrests alleged drug lord wanted by U.S", The Washington Post, January 17, 2009. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/01/17/AR2010011700824.html>

¹⁰ "Venezuela deportó narcotraficantes a EEUU y Francia y paramilitar a Colombia", Agencia Bolivariana de Noticias, 2 de febrero de 2010. <http://www.abn.info.ve/noticia.php?articulo=218357&lee=4>

¹¹ "No es cualquier cosa lo que hemos logrado en materia de lucha antidrogas", Agencia Bolivariana de Noticias, 21 de julio de 2009, <http://www.abn.info.ve/noticia.php?articulo=191752&lee=1>

¹² Políticas y estrategias soberanas en la lucha contra el Tráfico de Drogas, Cuadro vigilancia del espacio aéreo, ONA, Agosto 2009

¹³ "Gobierno incautó dos aeronaves estadounidenses dedicadas al tráfico ilícito de drogas," Últimas Noticias, 11 de enero de 2010.

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¹⁷ "ONA: Hornos incineradores de drogas son de alta tecnología, ecológicos y pirolíticos", Ministerio del Poder Popular para las Relaciones Exteriores, 01 de Agosto de 2009, http://www.mij.gov.ve/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=900:ona-hornos-incineradores-de-drogas-son-de-alta-tecnologia-ecologicos-y-piroliticos&catid=1:ultimas-noticias&Itemid=18

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²⁶ "INTERPOL lauds Venezuelan capture of suspected Colombian drug lord and accomplice," September 8, 2008, <http://www.interpol.int/Public/ICPO/PressReleases/PR2008/PR200845.asp>

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