

Broken Promises And Coca Eradication In Peru

The forced crop eradication policy implemented by the Peruvian government over the past 25 years has failed. The official strategy has exacerbated social conflicts; contributed to various types of subversive violence; jeopardized local economies, also affecting the national economy; and destroyed forests as crops have become more scattered. Worst of all, it has not resolved any of the underlying causes of drug trafficking, such as poverty, marginalisation and government neglect. The debate over coca in Peru has heated up again with the publication of the results of a survey of coca consumers by INEI/DEVIDA,¹ which is interpreted in a book coordinated by former Interior Minister Fernando Rospigliosi,² and by the publication in November 2004 of *Drug Trafficking's 13 Lies about the Coca Leaf*,³ which the government has been distributing in coca-growing valleys.

Legal coca questioned

The coca leaf was included in the number one list of the 1961 Single Convention, implying maximum control. The 1988 UN Drugs Convention, though, respects the traditional consumption of coca in areas where there is historical evidence of its continued use, such as Bolivia and Peru.⁴ Figures for traditional and beneficial industrial consumption of the plant would certainly be higher if they reflected the truth and were not limited to just a few thousand indigenous people, and if they did not shrug off the cultural, economic, social and political importance of consumption in the Andean countries. According to this widely distributed interpretation, coca is consumed by relatively few people, who live on the margins of modern society, exclude themselves from globalisation and reject the "good taste" of the Western world. There are various confusing estimates, and the few censuses of people who chew coca, who are known as *acullicadores* in Bolivia and *picchadores* in Peru, have always been biased by prejudice against coca and the people who grow it.

Recommendations

After being in effect for 43 years, the various schemes for reducing supply, which are spelled out in international treaties on drugs, should be reviewed.

Eradication, spraying and even substitution-based rural development have proven largely ineffective, harmful and indiscriminate, and have seriously violated basic collective rights.

These measures contradict international, constitutional and legislative norms that seek recognition of and respect for people's culture and traditions.

Regulations on illicit crops that were drawn up in 1961 and 1988 conflict with higher-level international norms on the protection of collective rights, which were established later. Authorities — judges, police, district attorneys and other officials — should keep these in mind when enforcing policies.

Countries like Peru and Bolivia should build a solid partnership to work to change the international control system, beginning with the coca leaf, and adopt specific measures for liberalising it, with regard to traditional markets.

1. INEI: National Institute of Statistics and Data Processing (*Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas e Informática*). DEVIDA: National Commission for Development and Life without Drugs (*Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo y Vida sin Drogas*).

2. F. Rospigliosi, C. Blondet and J. Antonio Llorens; *El consumo tradicional de hoja de coca en el Perú*; Lima: IEP, 2004.

3. Eight-page paid advertisement in the weekly newsmagazine "Caretas" No. 1859, November 25, 2004.

4. Article 14, Section 2 of the United Nations Convention of 1988 states that "The measures adopted shall respect fundamental human rights and shall take due account of traditional licit uses, where there is historic evidence of such use, as well as the protection of the environment."

Not in the case of a study by the World Health Organisation (WHO), which states that: 1) coca leaf consumption appears to have no negative physical effects and could have therapeutic value; 2) it would be interesting to discover the positive health effects of chewing coca leaves; 3) it would be interesting to investigate whether those effects can be transferred from traditional communities to other countries and cultures; and 4) the WHO should investigate the coca leaf's therapeutic benefits.⁵

Over the past four years, organised coca growers in Peru and Bolivia⁶ have asked their governments to carry out comprehensive studies to provide more detailed information about cultivation, production, trade, transformation and legal consumption of coca, as well as illegal use in drug trafficking. In both countries, there is currently intense debate on the subject.

As of May 2004, several analysts estimated that fewer than 1.5 million people in Peru consumed coca regularly. As the INEI/DEVIDA survey showed, however, the real figure is higher. Coca consumption is a fundamental element of the worldview of Andean and Amazonian people and a prime symbol of their identity. This custom is practiced in the highlands, on the coast and in the jungle, in communal work, by people hauling heavy loads or making long journeys on foot, and in traditional medicine, human relationships between different ethnic groups, and religious and pagan rituals.

Historical, archaeological and anthropological studies have also shown that the production of coca has been a crucial cultural element involving the Amazon lowlands, Andean highlands, Altiplano, intermontane valleys and coastal deserts and islands. Nevertheless, there has been no serious, thorough study of the complex dynamic of cultivation, production, trade and consumption for legal, traditional uses, and their many beneficial possibilities.

This lack of information makes it difficult to understand the nature of coca as a cultural element, a means of subsistence, a beneficial industrial input and raw material for illegal drugs. The prejudices against the plant, its derivative cocaine and its use and international pressure to eradicate the plant, have carried more weight than the government's ability to seriously investigate the subject. The recent INEI/DEVIDA survey does not solve that problem.

A history of broken promises

Farmers and local officials in the various coca-growing valleys have signed more than 36 agreements with the past three governments, but the administrations have systematically broken their promises. The most recent case is that of San Gabán, a remote district in the province of Carabaya, in the region of Puno. Local authorities have taken a stand for their people and against the forced eradication of coca crops, which began in September 2004. Forced eradication could be called the policy of the eight "ins" and "uns": *illegal, unconstitutional, illegitimate, inhumane, unjust, ineffective, immoral and idiotic*.

It is **illegal** and **unconstitutional**, because it contradicts DS 044-2003-PCM, signed into law by President Toledo after the coca growers' march in April/May 2003, in which the first article gives precedence to the gradual, consensus-based reduction of crops. Although Decree Law 22095 of 1978 contradicts this provision, the problem must be viewed in light of recent legislation, not a decree that has been questioned on the grounds that it is obsolete and ineffective and constitutes persecution. Forced eradication

5. A never published study called "The Cocaine Project, WHO/UNICRI, 1995, partly made public in Aurelio Diaz, *Hoja, pasta, polvo y roca. El consumo de los derivados de la coca*," Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona, 1999. The recommendations in this report sparked a formal, threatening protest by the U.S. government at the Sixth Meeting of the 48th World Health Assembly in Geneva on May 9, 1995. The incident is also described in "Coca, Cocaine and Conventions", Drug Policy Briefing TNI, March 2003: <http://www.tni.org/policybriefings/brief5.pdf>.

6. See: Hugo Cabieses and Alison Spedding; *Coca or Death? Cocalero movements in Peru and Bolivia*, TNI-Drugs and Conflict No. 10; Amsterdam, April 2004.

contradicts the Constitution by ruining farmers. Article 296 of the 1991 Criminal Code does not prohibit cultivation.

It is **illegitimate**, because eradication with nothing in return is harmful, and disperses the problem without solving it. It is **inhumane**, because it does not respect a plant that 4 million Peruvians⁷ consider to be important for health and social cohesion and a central element of Andean-Amazonian identity.

The policy is **unjust, ineffective, immoral** and absolutely **idiotic**, because it takes away farmers' means of subsistence without giving them viable alternatives, cuts short their dream of exercising their civil and political rights, fosters the development of subversive and criminal violence associated with drug trafficking, and leads to protests that are often quelled violently by government forces. These actions do not reduce the area under cultivation. In coca-growing valleys, the increase or decrease of the area planted in coca is related more to the legal and/or illegal market for coca than to the "success" of interdiction and eradication policies.

According to a study based on a survey by INEI and funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), 9,000 metric tons of coca would be enough to meet the demand for legal consumption in Peru, represented by 4 million people. That volume could be produced in a maximum of 10,000 hectares. That area is less than one-third of the 31,150 hectares currently planted, according to Devida, which generate an excess of 43,700 tons, which go to the drug trade.

But that assertion is unfounded if we calculate the rate of per-capita consumption: 9 million kilograms divided among 4 million people equals 2.25 kilograms per person per year.

FACTOR	VOLUME	%
Nat. Prod.: 31,150 has.	> 54,000 metric tons/yr	100.0
Legal market needs, according to INEI	9,000 metric tons/yr	17.0
Volume purchased by ENACO	< 3,000 metric tons/yr	5.6
<i>Source: "El derecho de matar," Nils Ericsson Correa in "El Comercio," April 23, 2004</i>		

Comments about the INEI/DEVIDA survey

- According to the survey: (1) about 7,500 tons of coca leaves are consumed annually in Peru; (2) about 1 million inhabitants over age 12 are *habitual* traditional consumers; (3) another 1 million people are *occasional* consumers, chewing coca every two weeks, once a month or once every two months; (4) these two types of consumers use 78 percent of the total amount of coca leaves consumed in Peru; (5) another 1 million people use the leaf in various traditional, ceremonial or other activities; (6) one million do not chew coca, but use it to make tea; (7) the total number of consumers of all types is about 4 million.
- The survey shows that most people who chew coca habitually have little formal education (40 percent are illiterate), live in rural areas, work in agriculture or are cattle breeders, have low incomes and are almost all indigenous. More than 60 percent are over the age of 35.
- The survey shows that 5 percent of the Peruvian population chews coca habitually. Closer analysis of the information, however, provides a better picture of this relative magnitude. The areas where consumption is greatest are the central and southern highlands, including Ayacucho, Apurímac, Huancavelica, Junín, Cusco and Puno, de-

7. See INEI/DEVIDA survey

partments where 42 percent of the country's rural population is concentrated. Approximately 2.3 million rural residents of this extensive region are age 12 or older.

- If, as the survey indicates, four-fifths of the habitual consumers (approximately 750,000) live in rural areas, mainly in the central and southern highlands, we can deduce that *about one-third* of the rural population age 12 or over in this region *habitually* consumes coca. Similarly, we can estimate that some 630,000 rural residents of that region are *occasional* consumers.
- Adding the habitual and occasional users, we can conclude that approximately 60 percent of the rural population in the central and southern highland departments chews coca. Although these are rough estimates, there is no doubt that the figures for coca leaf consumption are substantially higher if the analysis is done by region, rather than by using national averages.
- This is not the first survey of this type. Unfortunately, there was no reference to or analysis of previous studies, such as the 1950 U.N. Commission of Inquiry on the Coca Leaf, the Census of Coca Chewers done in 1965, the 1966 survey by the Ministry of Health and the United Nations (published in 1968), and the 2001 estimate by Contradrogas, to name just four such studies.
- Except for the most recent survey, there has been no comprehensive study including cultivation, production, trade and consumption.
- Bibliographic references about the widespread consumption of coca in Inca and pre-Inca times have not been used.
- It has not been demonstrated that the coca leaf does NOT constitute a symbol of Andean/Amazonian identity, as Rospigliosi states. Its use may have become widespread during colonial times in order to overexploit indigenous people.

Coca, tradition and illegality

Forty-three years after the creation of the international drug-control system, set out in the 1961 U.N. Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs and the conventions of 1971 and 1988, this mechanism for controlling supply has failed. It is unfair to the coca leaf as an agricultural and cultural resource. It also offers no alternative option to the enormous economic advantages offered by drug traffickers to those who depend on the crop. That is especially true of coca-growing farmers in the Guaviare and Putumayo valleys (Colombia), the Huallaga and Apurímac valleys (Peru) and the Chapare (Bolivia), all of which are located in the Andean-Amazonian region where 100 percent of the world's coca crop is produced.

** This article is a summary of a larger article, written by Hugo Cabieses Cubas, a Peruvian economist and consultant for TNI's Drugs and Democracy programme. The complete article can be found at our Web page.*



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