

**Vienna 2008. Ten years after  
ENCOD - Vienna, 8 march 2008**

**UN, plants and the history of announced murders  
Virginia Montañés Sánchez**

Good afternoon,

Unfortunately I am not going to say something new. We have come to Vienna to certify that the Manifesto we signed ten years ago is still updated:

*We state the fact that in most countries, drugs control policies currently intend to comply fully with International Conventions on Drugs (1961, 1971 and 1988); that these policies have proven unsuccessful in countering the illicit drugs trade, and, to the contrary, have contributed to its increase; that these policies have had damaging and counter-productive effects; that the weakest links of the illicit drugs chain (drugs consumers, couriers, and rural populations involved in the cultivation of illicit drugs-linked crops) have suffered a disproportionate amount of the negative consequences of drugs control policies.<sup>1</sup>*

Ten years ago, the Commission of Narcotic Drugs declared the goal "to eliminating or reducing significantly the illicit cultivation of the coca bush, the cannabis plant and the opium poppy by the year 2008".<sup>2</sup> We don't need to go very deep into research to confirm the failure of this objective. The good news is that even the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) confirms this failure.

Let's take a look to the UNODC figures of the opium poppy cultivation worldwide. As we can see in the graphic, the hectares cultivated with opium poppy have decreased from less than 250.000 h. in 1992 to around 200.000 hectares in 2006.<sup>3</sup> But this trend is changing again since 2005, and in 2007 the estimated area under illicit opium poppy increased by 17 per cent:<sup>4</sup>

---

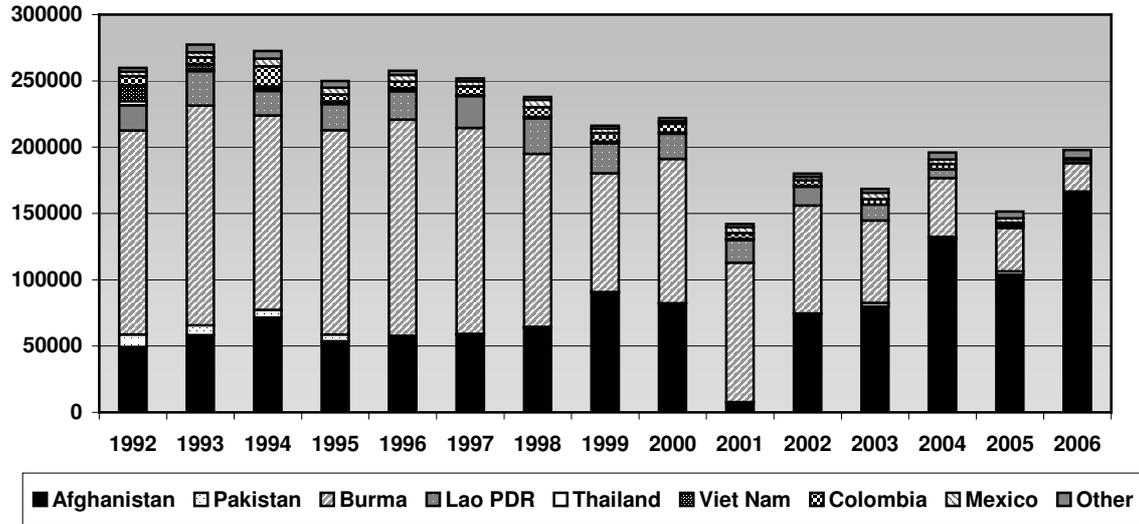
1 CIO, *Manifesto for Just and Effective Drug Policies*, 1998, <http://www.encod.org/info/MANIFESTO-FOR-JUST-AND-EFFECTIVE.html>.

2 UNGASS, *Political Declaration*, A/RES/S-20/2, 10 June 1998.

3 We haven't included the figures of the opium poppy crops in Mexico, since Mexico didn't provide them neither assumed the UNODC figures.

4 E/CN.7/2008/2, *The World Drug Problem. Fifth Report of the Executive Director*, 21 February 2008.

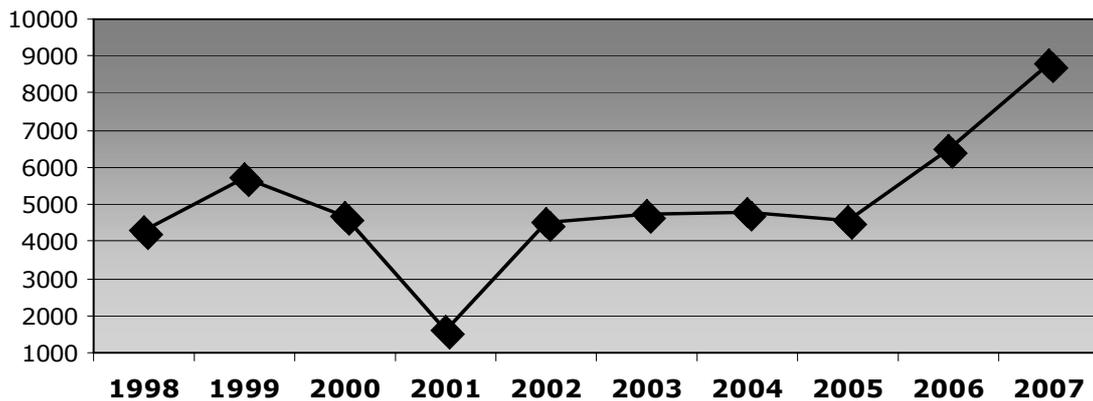
### Opium Poppy Cultivation (Hectares)



Source: World Drug Report 2007

If we take a look to the figures related to the production of dry opium worldwide, they have doubled during the last decade. In his report to the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, Mr. Costa states that "Global illicit opium poppy production reached 8,800 tons in 2007, an increase of 33 per cent over 2006 and double the amount produced in 1998".<sup>5</sup>

### Global production Dry Opium (Metric Tons)



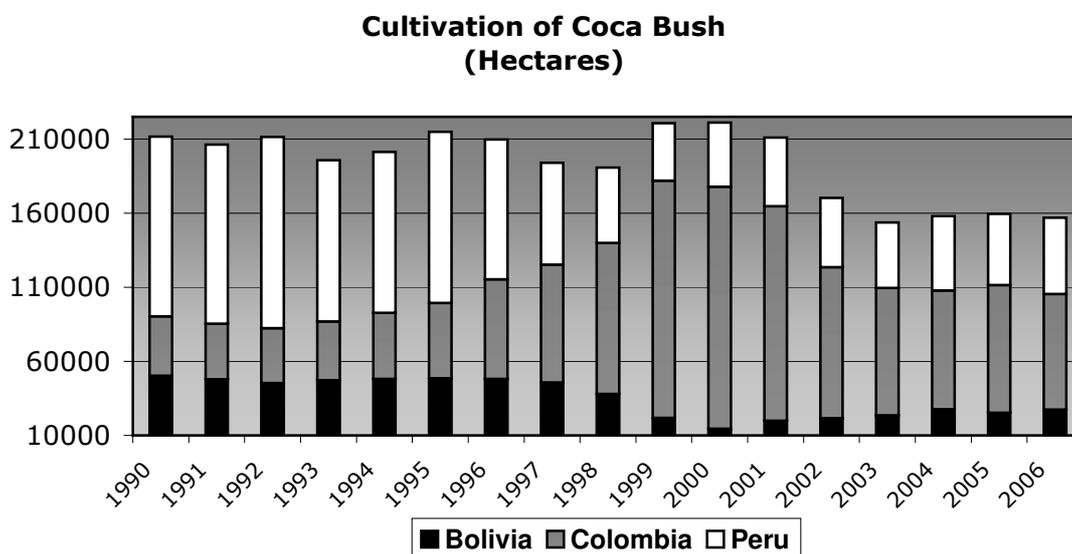
Source: World Drug Report 2007

5 E/CN.7/2008/2, The World Drug Problem, op. cit.

Quoting again to Mr. Costa: "Although considerable progress has been achieved in reducing the cultivation of opium poppy in South-East Asia, that progress has been offset by an increase in opium poppy cultivation and illicit opium production in Afghanistan".<sup>6</sup>

### Coca Bush Cultivation stable?

Let's check the UN figures for the coca crops in the Andean Region. As we can see in the graphic, the area with coca crops has remained stable during the last five years, with 160.000 hectares cultivated approximately. We have to take into account that in these figures are not included the new areas cultivated, since "there are no indications of large-scale coca cultivation outside the three main coca growing countries. Coca cultivation in neighbouring countries such as Ecuador and Venezuela is **thought** to be marginal".<sup>7</sup> This is just one example of the evidence-based data the UNODC provides in the report. They think that these crops are marginal, so they don't try to count them.



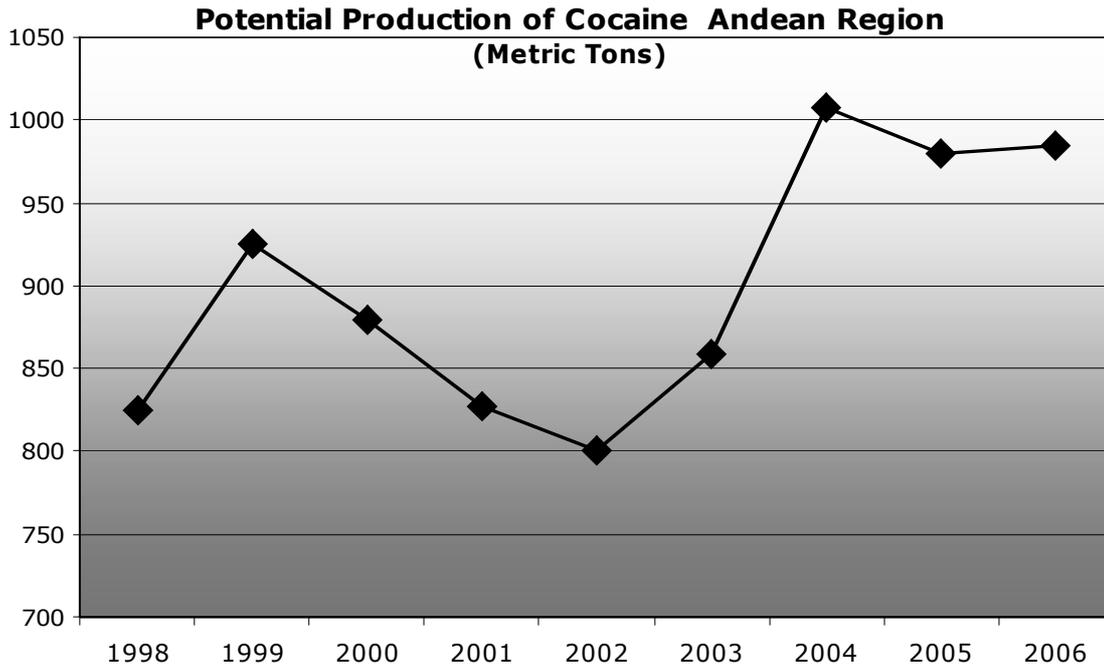
Source: World Drug Report 2007

In the meantime, according to the World Drug Report, "the overall potential production of cocaine reached 984 mt in 2006, about the same as a year earlier, with levels amounting to 610 mt in Colombia, 280 mt in Peru and 94 mt in Bolivia. Potential production is practically unchanged from the levels of a decade ago".<sup>8</sup> But as we can see in the graphic, in 1998 the potential production of cocaine was estimated in 825 metric tons, while in 2006, the figure increased to almost 1000 metric tons.

<sup>6</sup> E/CN.7/2008/2, *The World Drug Problem. Fifth Report of the Executive Director*, 21 February 2008.

<sup>7</sup> UNODC, *World Drug Report 2007*.

<sup>8</sup> UNODC, *World Drug Report 2007*.



**Source: World Drug Report 2007**

Again, Mr. Costa, in his report, acknowledges that *"In Bolivia, Colombia and Peru, a decline in the total area under illicit coca bush cultivation was achieved between 1998 and 2006; however, higher crop yields resulted in an increase in cocaine manufacture during that period"*.<sup>9</sup>

### **Cannabis production stable?**

According to the *World Drug Report 2007*, cannabis production is taking place in at least 172 countries and territories. But we will not review the figures of the cannabis cultivation since they are based in the reports from the Member States, and they don't seem to be evidence based figures, as the authors of the *World Drug Report* acknowledge:

*"Cannabis production estimates must be viewed with caution: Although, production estimates for cannabis are systematically collected by UNODC from Member States as part of the replies to the annual reports questionnaire (ARQ), the lack of clear geographical concentrations of cannabis production (as with opium poppy or coca bush) makes it impracticable to introduce scientifically reliable crop monitoring systems"*.<sup>10</sup>

But, after saying that, they give to us the second example of non-evidence based statement, coming to the conclusion that the expansion of cannabis production ceased in 2005, and that there are indications of an overall stabilisation of the market.

<sup>9</sup> E/CN.7/2008/2, *The World Drug Problem*, op. cit.

<sup>10</sup> UNODC, *World Drug Report 2007*.

## Consequences of the eradication efforts

Coming back to the 1998 Manifesto, we can also confirm that it is still updated stating that among the consequences of the drug control policies are:

- a) Violation of basic human rights (political, economic, cultural, health, etc.) of the weakest links in the illicit drugs chain;
- b) Criminalisation and discrimination which provoke the marginalisation of drugs consumers and those farmers involved in the illicit cultivation of drugs-linked crops, as well as other poor sectors of society who are involved in the production and trade of illicit drugs as actors with little or no responsibility;
- c) Expenditure of funds destined for law enforcement, which would be better, spent establishing adequate prevention, harm reduction and treatment programmes;
- d) Damage caused to the environment through unsustainable eradication and substitution methods;
- e) Violation of the national sovereignty of those nations who have signed the International Conventions on Drugs, and in particular of the so-called drugs-producing countries.
- f) Erosion of the Rule of Law through the creation of national and international drugs control bodies that escape democratic control, as well as through the extension of arbitrariness and corruption.

Still, the good news is that even the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) acknowledges part of these consequences in the last Annual Report:

*"Some countries still expend disproportionate effort in targeting low level offenders and drug users, as compared to the more pressing issues of identifying, dismantling and punishing those who control or organize major drug trafficking activities".<sup>11</sup>*

The bad news are that, in an exercise of Schizophrenia, they recommend *"to abolish or prohibit activities that are contrary to the 1961 Convention, such as coca leaf chewing and the manufacture of mate de coca (coca tea) and other products containing coca alkaloids for domestic use and export".<sup>12</sup>* I would like to know how the Member States could implement these two recommendations without becoming schizophrenic too.

This is the problem, and the worst news: the high price people have paid to prove that current drug policies are not working. Death, torture, imprisonment, violation of human rights, poverty, ...

Unfortunately, we don't have figures of all the people killed, incarcerated, tortured, displaced, criminalized, etc. in the name of the war on drugs. We would need an entire day just to discuss that. But we can see some examples:

In Burma, a complete ban on the trade of opium and cultivation of opium poppy entered into force in the Wa region in June 2005, and in the same year the region was declared opium free. According to the report on the opium poppy cultivation in South East Asia, published by the UNODC last October,

---

11 INCB, *Annual Report 2007*, Vienna, 2007.

12 INCB, *Annual Report 2007*, op. cit.

"After the opium ban and associated loss of income, the number of vulnerable households has doubled and now represents more than 55% of the total. This has seriously increased food and livelihood insecurity in the area".

"Opium farmers relied on the yearly opium harvest as a source of cash, which helped them to cover their food deficit and purchase other necessary items. Today, these farmers face a lack of cash income, and are therefore forced to reduce their expenditures. With few opportunities to invest in alternative income generation activities, some of these farmers were not successful in coping with the effects of the opium ban. Consequently, their living conditions have worsened, which is reflected in a lack of food and the inability to purchase necessary household items. This increases their vulnerability, which is manifested in an deteriorating health status and by increasing school drop-outs as farmers can no longer afford school fees for their children".<sup>13</sup>

Human Rights Watch estimates that 125,000 villagers have been forcedly relocated from northern Shan State since 1999, as part of the strategy to eradicate opium production in the Wa hills and extend the boundaries of Wa State. These internal displaced persons were moved to non-state controlled relocation sites and several thousand Shan and other local inhabitants have been displaced to make way for the newcomers.<sup>14</sup>

Does it mean that there are not opium poppy crops in Burma? No, they just went to another area in the same State. While no opium cultivation was observed in the Wa region in 2006, which had accounted for 30 per cent of national opium poppy cultivation in the previous year, a large increase in cultivation was observed in the South Shan State, which increased its share of national cultivation from 34 per cent in 2005 to 73 per cent in 2006.<sup>15</sup>

In Laos there has been a dramatic decrease of the opium poppy crops during the last decade. Since 2002, the number of households estimated to be related to opium poppy cultivation has decreased from 38,000 to 5,800 in 2006. Only 50% of the country's poorest former opium poppy growing villages had received development assistance since giving up opium cultivation.<sup>16</sup> Some of them have returned to cultivate opium. Others have been forced to migrate to other areas, following a government's resettlement programme that amounts to a complete restructuring of rural society in Laos. Hundreds of villages, many of them of Indigenous Peoples, have been moved from the mountains down to lowland areas.<sup>17</sup>

On April 9, 2001 the National Assembly passed an amendment to the country's 1990 criminal code that introduced the death penalty for drug trafficking. The amended law included capital punishment for producers, distributors, smugglers and anyone found in possession of heroin, as well as traffickers of amphetamines and methamphetamines. A death sentence would be assured to those found in possession of more than 500 grams of heroin, or more than three kilograms of methamphetamines. Before the amendments prison terms for drug offenders ranged from life to ten years, depending on the amount found in possession.

---

13 UNODC, *Opium Poppy Cultivation in South East Asia. Lao PDR, Myanmar and Thailand*, October 2007, [http://www.unodc.org/pdf/research/icmp/south\\_east\\_asia\\_report\\_2007\\_web.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/pdf/research/icmp/south_east_asia_report_2007_web.pdf).

14 Human Rights Watch, "They Came and Destroyed Our Village Again". *The Plight of Internally Displaced Persons in Karen State*, June 2005, Vol. 17, No 4(C).

15 UNODC, *World Drug Report 2007*.

16 UNODC, *Opium Poppy Cultivation in South East Asia*. Op. cit.

17 Chris Lang, "US War on Drugs in Laos Leading to Increased Poverty", *WRM Bulletin*, Issue Number 82 - May 2004, <http://www.akha.org/content/akhainlaos/docs/uswarondrugsinlaos.html>.

Prison conditions are generally extremely harsh and life threatening. Food rations are minimal, and prisoners are sometimes subjected to torture and other abuses by members of the security forces. Credible sources have reported that detainees were subjected to beatings, long-term solitary confinement in completely darkened rooms, and burning with cigarettes. In some cases, detainees were held in leg chains or wooden stocks.<sup>18</sup>

In Colombia the use of fumigation strategies to eradicate coca crops sets in motion a vicious circle, very well documented by the Transnational Institute. Aerial fumigation causes chemical pollution affecting humans, animals and vegetation and destroys the livelihood of peasants and indigenous communities, forcing these groups to migrate deeper into the rainforest. This displacement accelerates the pace of deforestation where slash and burned plots are planted with illicit coca or poppy crops replacing those previously fumigated. The new plots are eventually fumigated and the cycle starts over again exacerbating the current armed conflict.<sup>19</sup>

According to TNI, Studies by the Colombian Human Rights Ombudsman's Office in 2001 and 2002 indicate that aerial spraying has affected legal crops in the areas where it has occurred, and that health problems have been caused by inhalation of the herbicide or contact with human skin. The potentially harmful nature of aerial spraying has also been recognised by various scientific studies carried out in the United States, Colombia and Ecuador, and has led to several court cases.<sup>20</sup>

### **Alternatives...**

As we have seen, there are few signals of a change in the discourse of the UN institutions, some of them very subtle ones, some of them clearer. In his speech on the last International Drug Policy Reform Conference, Mr. Costa acknowledged: "*Is a drugs free world attainable? Probably not*".<sup>21</sup>

So why to keep the fiction?

Now is our turn to speak up, our turn to participate in the evaluation process of the UNGASS and in the EU Civil Society Forum to defend just and effective drug policies.

We are citizens. Let's practise our rights.

Let's support initiatives like the ordinance of the regional government of Puno, in Peru, suspending the forced eradication of coca crops in that region or the new possibility for cannabis despenalization in Jamaica. Let's promote the cannabis social clubs. And let's think about how to apply this model to the other prohibited drugs.

Thank you very much.

---

18 Hands of Cain. Against Death Penalty in the World, *Laos*, <http://www.handsoffcain.info/bancadati/schedastato.php?idcontinent=23&nome=laos>.

19 Martín Jelsma, *Vicious Circle*, TNI, 2001.

20 TNI, Plan Colombia's Aerial Spraying. A Failure Foretold, 2004, [http://www.tni-archives.org/detail\\_page.phtml?page=drugscolumbia-docs\\_plan-e#1a](http://www.tni-archives.org/detail_page.phtml?page=drugscolumbia-docs_plan-e#1a).

21 Antonio M. Costa, *Free drugs or drug free?*, International Drug Policy Reform Conference, New Orleans, 7 December 2007.