

Viewing cable 07QUITO1553, GLYPHOSATE TAKES ANOTHER HIT IN ECUADOR

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SUBJECT: GLYPHOSATE TAKES ANOTHER HIT IN ECUADOR

Classified By: PolOff Jarahn Hillsman, Reasons 1.4 (b&d)

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The Ecuadorian Commission studying the health and environmental impacts of Colombia's aerial coca eradication program on Ecuador's north released its findings on July 2. The Commission argues that the chemical mixture used by the GOC since 2000 is highly toxic and has caused environmental, agricultural, and health damages. The report questions the validity of the GOC and CICAD scientific evidence in support of fumigation programs. The Commission recommends a permanent cessation of aerial fumigations within 10 kilometers of the Ecuador border, and advocates compensation to residents in the "affected" zone. As expected, the study fails to consider other potential impacts on public health and the environment; such as extreme poverty, lack of potable water, poor health care, and cocaine processing. President Correa commended the committee for its "patriotic" work, and vowed to continue efforts to protect and improve the lives of Ecuadorians living in the north.

The GOE will present the Commission's findings to the GOC at the July 8 meeting of the bilateral committee established to jointly study the issue. The GOC in turn is expected to present its own findings to the joint committee for consideration. End Summary.

Commission Presents Glyphosate Impact Report to Correa

¶2. (U) The Ecuadorian Scientific Commission composed of non-governmental national experts that was established by the GOE to study the negative affects of Colombia's aerial coca eradication program on the environment and public health in Ecuador's northern border region presented its findings to President Correa on July 2. Vice President Lenin Moreno, Minister of Foreign Affairs Maria Espinosa, and Minister of Government Gustavo Larrea also attended the public unveiling of the report. Correa, after listening to the Commission's results, reiterated his government's commitment to protecting the health and environment of northern border residents. He faulted a lack of policy direction in previous administrations for increasing the region's vulnerability, and vowed not to allow the fumigations to continue. Correa thanked the commission and called its work "invaluable" in helping the GOE advance its efforts to curtail aerial dissemination of glyphosate. ForMin Espinosa said the GOE would continue efforts to take the GOC before the ICJ, and would push for a permanent cessation of spraying within 10 kilometers of the Ecuadorian border.

¶3. (U) The seven-member Scientific Commission is comprised of well-respected Ecuadorians who most here consider to be impartial. The members are listed below:

--Dr. Ramiro Avila: Lawyer; International Law and Human Rights expert.

--Dr. Elizabeth Bravo: Ecologist; Professor at the Salesian Polytechnic University.

--Dr. Jaime Breilh: Epidemiologist. Director of Health Studies at the Andean University of Quito.

--Dr. Arturo Campana: Mental Health Specialist; Professor at Quito's Central University.

--Dr. Cesar Paz-y-Mino: Director of the Molecular Genetics and Human Cytogenesis Laboratory at the Catholic Pontifica University of Ecuador.

--Luis Penaherrera: Engineer/Architect; Specialist in herbicides.

--Dr. Jose Valencia: Political Scientist; Professor of International Law at the Catholic University, University San Francisco of Quito, and FLACSO.

Commission: Findings Support GOE Position on Aerial Spraying

¶4. (U) The Commission's 150-page report argues that Colombia's fumigations program is harming the social structure, health, and ecosystem of Ecuadorian communities along the Colombia-Ecuador border. The report argues that spraying has occurred at heights of up to 60 meters, rather than 3 meters as recommended, allowing for drifting of chemical droplets into Ecuador. This, according to the Commission, has negatively impacted the regions, endemic vegetation, agriculture, livestock, fish and aquatic fauna, and human health. The report does acknowledge, however, that not all "evidence and variable correlations have been fully established."

¶5. (U) The study offered the following general conclusions:

--The herbicide mixture used by the GOC since 2000 is causing considerable damage to the environment, agricultural sector, human health, and socioeconomic condition in Ecuador's northern border zone. It asserts that glyphosate, POEA, Cosmoflux, and other chemicals as present in the mixture used for aerial fumigation are highly toxic.

--The report claims that there are a number of international studies that note the dangers of aerial fumigations with the mixture used by Colombia to human health and ecosystems.

--The CICAD study is scientifically flawed; CICAD's agenda was to justify and support counter-narcotics programs and, specifically, aerial coca eradication with this formula.

--The GOE and Ecuadorian academics have verified the negative impact on soil, crops, and animals, as well as its impact on human physical and mental health.

--Aerial fumigations have contributed to a number of negative consequences in communities such as migration, insecurity, a lower quality of life, disadvantages in obtaining food and housing.

--The technical and scientific evidence of the harm due to aerial fumigations supports Ecuador's position that this method should not be continued because of the problems produced, and is inconsistent with international norms of respect for human rights, and principles set forth by multinational organizations such as the United Nations, World Health Organization, International League of Human Rights, and the Convention on Biological Diversity.

--The testimonies regarding the diverse impacts which have been collected by the Commission in the zone also warrant compensation for the damages incurred.

MFA Pessimistic About Prospects for Bilateral Committee

¶6. (C) Vice Foreign Minister Rafael Paredes told the DCM on June 27 that the bilateral committee established to jointly study the impact of aerial coca eradication would meet in Bogota on July 8. Paredes expressed GOE frustration over what they see as the GOC's refusal to provide the necessary

studies in support of its position to the committee, and questioned the potential for a constructive outcome by way of the commission. Colombian Foreign Minister Fernando Araujo during his May 28 visit to Ecuador told ForMin Espinosa that Colombia would submit its findings on the impact of aerial spraying at the July 8 meeting. Araujo also stated publicly that Colombia would compensate residents who could prove scientifically that they had been harmed by the GOC's aerial fumigations program. The GOC's position helped ease pressure on bilateral relations, placing the issue back in the realm of the bilateral commission.

¶7. (U) Correa and Uribe originally agreed to form a tripartite commission on January 10 during a side meeting at the Ortega inauguration in Nicaragua. The commission was to include representatives from Ecuador, Colombia, and the OAS or UN, with the objective of determining whether aerial spraying in Colombia was having an adverse impact on Ecuador. An international representative has not yet been asked to participate.

Counsel for Plaintiffs in Dyncorp Case Draws Crowd

¶8. (U) In a related development, the American lawyer representing 1,600 Ecuadorians and the provincial governments of Esmeraldas, Carchi, and Sucumbios in the case against Dyncorp (the aerial fumigation contractor in the border region), Jeff Frazier, participated in a symposium hosted by the GOE's Northern Border Development Unit (UDENOR) on June 28-29 in Quito. Frazier said that Colombia's aerial eradication program had contaminated the environment, caused severe health problems, and had harmed the local economy. He argued that Dyncorp had been hired to fumigate in Colombian territory, not Ecuador, and since they had proof that glyphosate had drifted across the border and caused damage, the company failed to fulfill its contractual obligations and is therefore liable. ForMin Espinosa has expressed the GOE's support for the civil case against Dyncorp, but has stressed it is private matter not directly involving the GOE.

¶9. (U) Human rights activist Rafael Jaque, who is affiliated with the Latin American Human Rights Organization (ALDHU) and has worked with Frazier on the case, was also on the panel. Jaque said that Colombia's aerial spraying program had caused genetic disorders, hair loss, skin disease, cancer, and raised infant mortality rates. He expressed satisfaction over the decision of the U.S. federal judge to deny Dyncorp protection as a contractor, and said that there are plans to possibly go after Monsanto for using Roundup Ultra in fumigations, which he said was illegal in the US. Embassy Quito paid for the participation of an EPA expert in border issues to inject some positive and balanced perspective at the conference, not on the glyphosate issue but on other panel topics where positive USG contributions to border zone air, water and sanitation quality could be stressed.

Comment

¶10. (C) Belief that Colombia's aerial coca eradication program is adversely impacting Ecuadorians in the north has gained even wider acceptance and legitimacy here with the release of this report. The corresponding Colombian report of the facts from its perspective will be a critical event in this ongoing debate. A full Colombian exposition of its position is not likely to turn the debate around in Ecuador, but will provide important balance to this contentious issue. Addressing other potential causes of the health effects noted in this report would be especially useful.

¶11. (C) GOE counter-narcotics cooperation continues to be quite strong under the Correa administration despite this dispute. The anti-narcotics police, under the direction of a new and dedicated colonel, are at or above last year's seizure rates, the Ecuadorian military in the northern border region is far ahead of past years in staging operations against FARC base camps and cocaine processing labs, the Post Office Director is requesting assistance to stop trafficking through the Ecuador's mail system, and anti-money laundering and judicial reform activities are positive. Top GOE officials have also expressed a desire to deepen security cooperation to counter what the GOE finally admits is a growing problem throughout the country. This anti-glyphosate campaign, which the Correa administration inherited, does not reflect a lack of willingness to combat international narcotics trafficking, but more a specific, nationalistic response to growing public angst over perceived negative health and environmental impacts of aerial fumigations and long-standing tensions and frustrations with the Colombia relationship.

¶12. (C) It is widely known here that the U.S. funds Colombia's aerial fumigation program, and that we backed the CICAD study. That being said, the GOE has refrained from publicly drawing the U.S. into the glyphosate dispute, preferring instead to keep it a bilateral issue with Colombia. While we agree publicly that it is an issue between Colombia and Ecuador, privately we have expressed our belief that glyphosate is safe and encouraged the GOE to also consider that extreme poverty, lack of potable water, poor healthcare, and increased cocaine processing in northern Ecuador are likely to blame. We will continue to encourage the GOE to work with the GOC to find a solution to this debate and hope that the Colombians will be pro-active in the July 8 meeting in refuting the charges in this report.

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