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Andean Information Network

**To:** Interested Colleagues  
**From:** Kathryn Ledebur, Director, Andean Information Network (AIN)  
Coletta A. Youngers, Senior Fellow, Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA)  
**Date:** May 23, 2007  
**RE:** ONDCP Reports No Increase in Coca Cultivation in Bolivia in 2006

On April 25, 2007, the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) released U.S. estimates of coca cultivation and cocaine production in Bolivia for 2006. In the preceding months, U.S. officials had repeatedly warned of soaring coca cultivation in Bolivia in what was President Evo Morales' first year in office. Indeed, the State Department's latest *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report* (INCSR), released on March 1, 2007, asserted that initial U.S. estimates had shown cultivation "increases in most parts of the country," and that [c]ocalero activism and the [Bolivian] government's desire to avoid violent confrontation have contributed to the rise in coca cultivation."

Coming in the wake of numerous U.S. references to rising coca cultivation in Bolivia, it is noteworthy that **ONDCP reported that coca cultivation in 2006 was "statistically unchanged as compared to the 2005 estimate" and that "[c]ocaine potential production remained unchanged ... from 2005 to 2006."**<sup>1</sup>

**ONDCP's announcement indicates that the Morales administration's policy of limited coca production for licit uses, in conjunction with cooperative coca reduction, may be delivering better results than forced eradication in containing coca production in Bolivia.** In 2006, the Bolivian government's policies appeared to limit (or contain) the problem of replanting that has plagued past forced eradication efforts. Crucially, the government's approach has also avoided the intense social conflict and violence that have accompanied forced eradication campaigns.<sup>2</sup>

ONDCP's April 25 announcement also marked the first time that the U.S. government presented one of its coca cultivation estimates as a range – rather than as a single figure or "point estimate."<sup>3</sup> **By choosing to present a range rather than a single figure, ONDCP has opened the door to a more realistic consideration of the government's coca cultivation and cocaine production estimates.** The State Department's INCSR routinely asserts that the government can "estimate the extent of cultivation with reasonable accuracy," but in reporting the new estimate for Bolivia as a range, ONDCP has now acknowledged – indirectly at least – that these measures entail considerable uncertainty. (ONDCP's 2006 coca cultivation estimate for Peru, released on May 14, 2007, also reports a range rather than a single figure.)<sup>4</sup>

After repeatedly warning that coca cultivation had risen during President Morales' first year in office, the Bush administration may have wanted to avoid presenting the 2006 estimate in a way that would appear to contradict their earlier statements or that would appear to reflect well upon the coca policies of the Morales government. Introducing the range and implicitly admitting that the estimates are less "certain" than advertised could be an attempt to highlight the possibility that, as U.S. officials have claimed, coca growing may be on the rise in Bolivia – even though the estimate itself does not

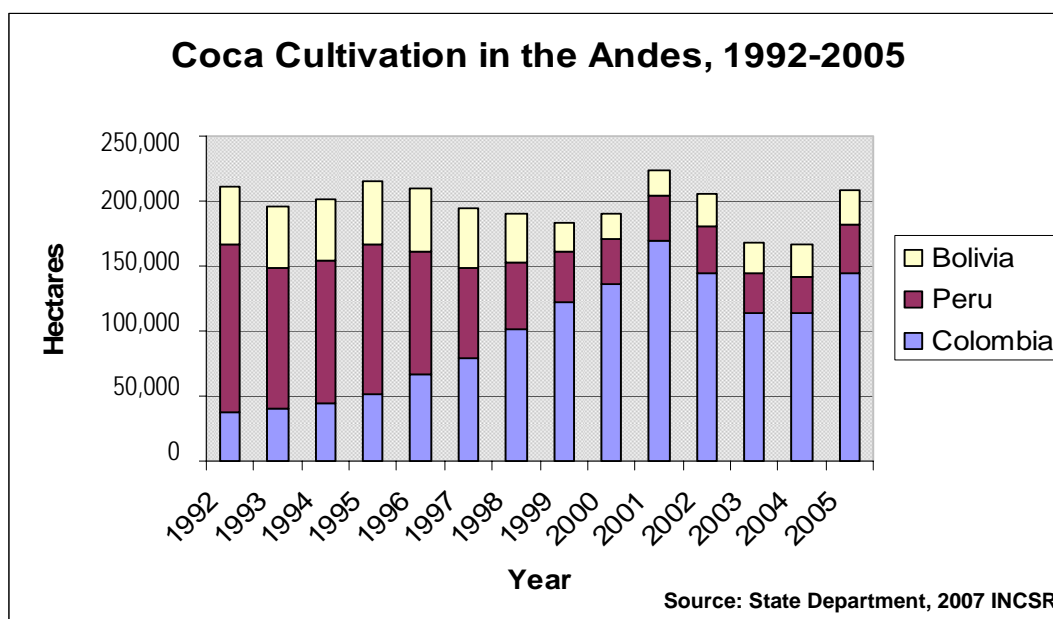
bear that out. However, **the bottom line reported by ONDCP is that there is no significant change in coca cultivation or cocaine production estimates.**

The following statements in italics are from ONDCP’s *2006 Counternarcotics Assessment for Bolivia* released on April 25, 2007. Our analysis follows.

**Coca cultivation estimates**

*“We estimate Bolivia’s coca cultivation at between 21,000 and 32,500 hectares with a 90 percent confidence limit.”*

- Presenting the estimates as a single figure masks the uncertainties in the measurement process. The true extent of coca cultivation is not known nearly as precisely as the point estimates imply – and the coca yield and cocaine production estimates are even less certain.
- Consistently presenting the estimates as ranges would help to correct that, making it easier to appreciate the more important, long-term patterns – one of which is the apparent stability of overall Andean coca cultivation over the past two decades (see Chart 1).
- Consistent presentation of the coca cultivation and cocaine production estimates in the form of a range would also help shift policy attention toward long-term trends and away from a debilitating fixation on short-term targets.



YEAR	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
<b>Colombia</b>	37,100	39,700	45,000	50,900	67,200	79,500	101,800	122,500	136,200	169,800	144,450	113,850	114,100	144,000
<b>Peru</b>	129,100	108,800	108,600	115,300	94,400	68,800	51,000	38,700	34,200	34,000	36,600	31,150	27,500	38,000
<b>Bolivia</b>	45,500	47,200	48,100	48,600	48,100	45,800	38,000	21,800	19,600	19,900	24,400	23,200	24,600	26,500

Bolivian coca production is “*statistically unchanged as compared to the 2005 estimate range of 21,400 and 32,500 hectares.*”

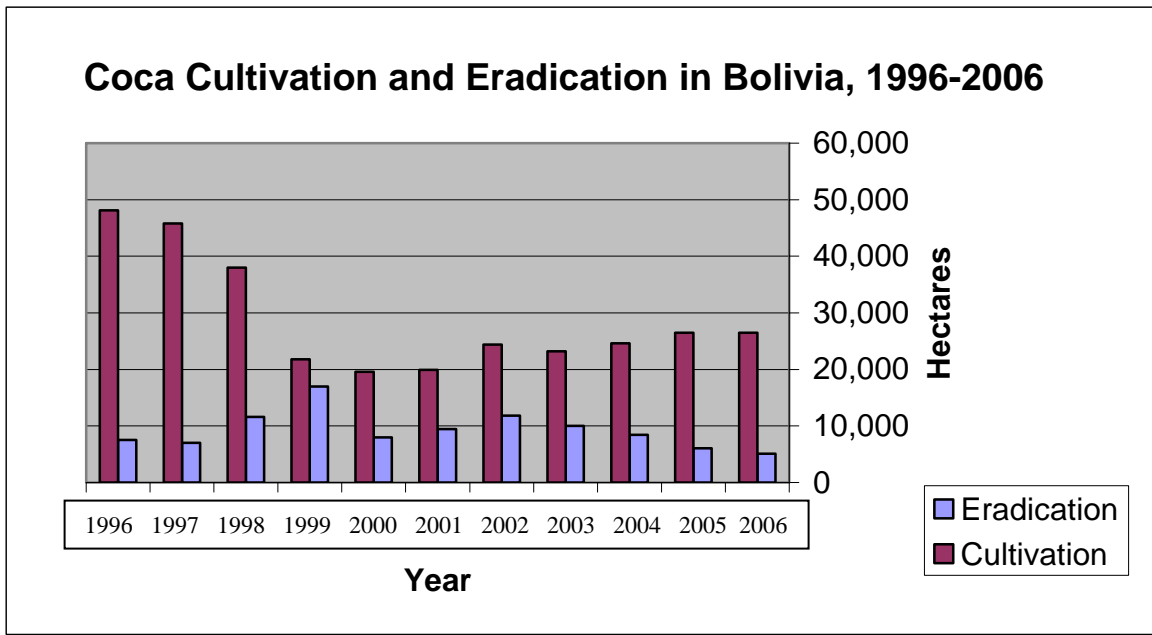
- According to the State Department’s 2007 INCSR, between 2000 and 2005, coca production had increased in Bolivia each year, with the exception of 2003 (see Chart 2).<sup>5</sup> In the period from 2000 to 2004, according to these figures, coca cultivation increased in Bolivia under the U.S.-supported and funded forced eradication program.
- The first year of the Morales government’s cooperative coca reduction strategy, 2006, registered no significant change in Bolivia’s coca crop. (By comparison, the Peruvian government exceeded its 10,000 hectare eradication goal in 2006, but according to ONDCP’s May 14 statement on Peru, “the overall assessment shows a 17 percent increase when compared to similar survey areas assessed for 2005.”)<sup>6</sup>
- For the two years that the *cato* provision has been in place in Bolivia, allowing farmers in the Chapare region and some peripheral areas of the La Paz Yungas to grow 1,600 square meters of coca legally to cover their subsistence needs, ONDCP has reported “*relative stability*” of cultivation (2005)<sup>7</sup> and coca cultivation as “*statistically unchanged*” (2006).
- U.S. figures showed an 8 percent increase in Bolivia’s coca crop in 2005, the first year without forced eradication, only one-fifth the percentage increase in Peru, and only one-third the percentage increase in Colombia, both countries employing forced eradication strategies.<sup>8</sup>

“*The estimate showed a decrease in cultivation in the Yungas, a conclusion that is not readily supportable given the lack of eradication and anecdotal reporting of increased cultivation... All other major growing regions registered increases during 2006.*”

- ONDCP suggests that they do not believe their own estimates and that overall coca production may have increased; however, they provide no justification for this assertion.
- In 2005, ONDCP reported that there was “limited room for expansion in Bolivia’s main licit production area, the Yungas.”<sup>9</sup> It is unclear why such an expansion would now be anticipated.

“*While Bolivia met its self-established coca eradication goal of 5,000 hectares in mid-December, the 2006 effort represented the lowest level of eradication in more than ten years.*”

- Eradication statistics alone provide an incomplete assessment of coca cultivation. Since 2000, high levels of eradication – sometimes double that of 2006 – were accompanied by rapid replanting of coca bushes, leading to net increases in cultivation.
- In 2006, however, less eradication appears to be accompanied by significantly less replanting, leading to no significant change in net cultivation.



YEAR	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
NET CULTIVATION	48,100	45,800	38,000	21,800	19,600 <sup>10</sup>	19,900	24,400	23,200	24,600	26,500	26,500 <sup>11</sup>
ERADICATION	7,512	7,026	11,621	16,999	7,953	9,435	11,839	10,000	8,437	6,073	5,070

**Cocaine Production Estimates**

*“Cocaine potential production remained unchanged at 115 metric tons from 2005 to 2006... It remains to be seen if the increased interdiction results are from stricter law enforcement, or as a result of increased cocaine production due to a more permissive environment.”*

- The assessment states that potential cocaine production remained unchanged, but then suggests without evidence that increased interdiction may be a result of increased cocaine production.
- The April 2007 ONDCP statement contradicts the March 2007 INCSR, which states: “According to Bolivian law enforcement, the number of cocaine base labs more than doubled since the inauguration of President Morales.”<sup>12</sup>
- ONDCP’s statement fails to acknowledge the significant increase in interdiction operations reported by Bolivian law enforcement agencies. Nor does it take into account the reported increase in Peruvian cocaine production and the subsequent reports of increased Peruvian cocaine shipped through Bolivia.

**Coca Control Strategy**

*“President Morales announced his intention to increase the amount of hectareage allowed for legal coca cultivation from 12,000 to 20,000 – a change that would contravene the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotics Drugs.”*

- The 12,000 hectare limit for coca production was arbitrarily determined in 1988 and is not based on a scientifically-derived, widely agreed-upon estimate of the amount of coca needed for legal consumption of the coca leaf and related products.

- The proposed increase in legal coca production does not in and of itself represent an increase in production levels, presently estimated at approximately 25,000 hectares.
- The Bolivian government has stated that any coca deviated to the illicit market – i.e., the cocaine trade – will be interdicted.

### **Misleading and contradictory U.S. statements**

In March 2007, the State Department reported that “as of August 2006, countrywide cultivation appears to have increased in three of four regions: 33 percent in Apolo, 45 percent in Caranavi, and 17 percent in the Chapare. The total cultivation in the Yungas in 2006 may have increased, but exact figures are lacking.”<sup>13</sup> Yet just one month later, the U.S. government reported that the amount of coca grown remains statistically unchanged.

In fact, since Evo Morales assumed the presidency of Bolivia, U.S. officials have consistently claimed that the more “permissive” approach would lead to significant increases in coca and hence cocaine production in that country:

*“We’re certainly concerned about what appears to be a tendency on their government (sic) to increase the area under cultivation.”* Assistant Secretary of State for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs Anne Patterson, “Release of the 2007 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report,” On-the-Record Briefing, March 1, 2007.

*“Cocalero activism and a desire to avoid violent confrontations have led to a rise in coca production.”* State Department, 2007 INCSR.

*“We are conscious also of increased interest in Bolivia by drug traffickers as a result of increased coca production.”*<sup>14</sup> U.S. Ambassador to Bolivia Philip Goldberg quoted in the article “EEUU alerta que más coca atrae a los narcotraficantes extranjeros,” *La Razón*, March 30, 2007.

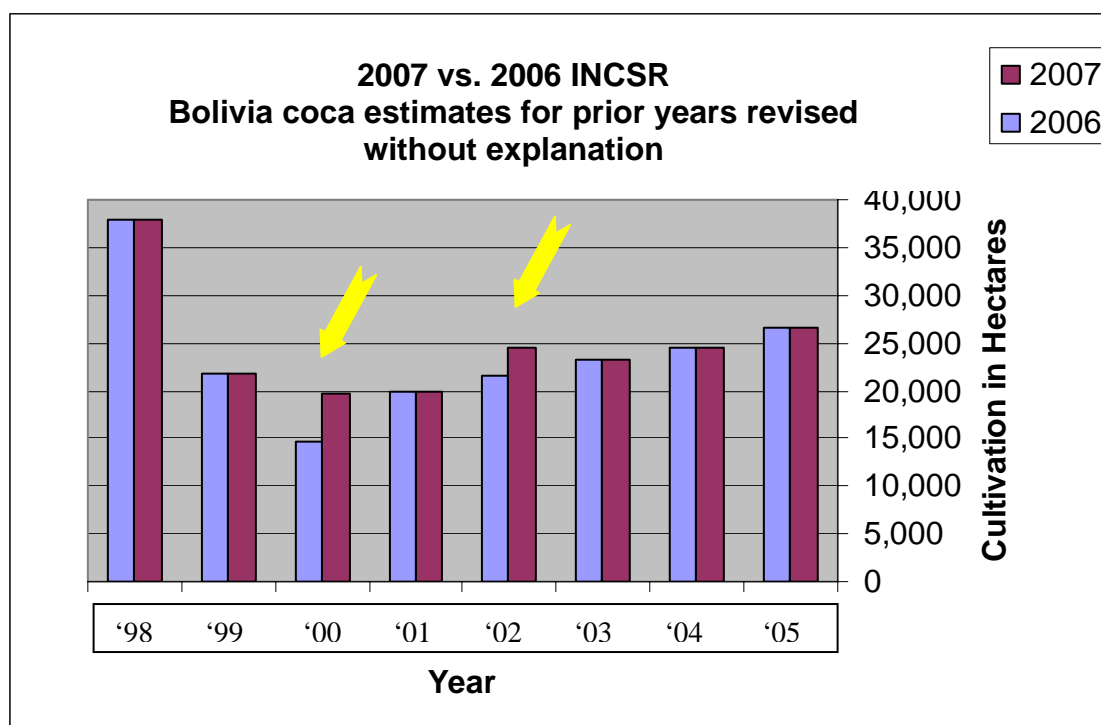
Bolivia *“has undertaken policies that have allowed the expansion of coca cultivation and slowed the pace of eradication.”* The White House, Presidential Determination No. 2006-24, September 15, 2006.

Such assertions – ultimately not substantiated by the U.S. government’s annual assessment of coca production in Bolivia – have damaged U.S. credibility. Beyond highlighting the considerable uncertainties attending the cultivation and production estimates, the contradictory statements and assertions appear intended to cast doubt upon the evidence that the current Bolivian government’s coca control strategy may be having greater initial success than past approaches.

### **In light of these developments we recommend that:**

- **The Bush administration issue clear guidelines on the limitations of the U.S. government’s coca cultivation and cocaine production estimates, and describe how it intends to report on such estimates in the future. These should be applied across the board to all Andean countries.**

- The U.S. government presents all of its future estimates as ranges rather than as point estimates, explicitly acknowledging the degree of uncertainty that attends the measurements.
- ONDCP and the State Department augment the previously published cultivation and production estimates – which have always been presented as single figures – with the corresponding ranges, as ONDCP has already done in the case of the 2005 coca estimate for Bolivia.
- The Bolivian government be given the flexibility and support required to implement alternative coca control strategies that, if successful, could avoid replanting and secure the long-term coca reduction gains that have eluded such efforts in the Andes to date.



**NOTES**

<sup>1</sup> Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), *2006 Counternarcotics Assessment for Bolivia*, 25 April 2007, <http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/news/press07/042507.html>.

<sup>2</sup> For additional information on the Bolivian government’s drug control policy, see Kathryn Ledebur and Coletta A. Youngers, *Crisis or Opportunity? Bolivian Drug Control Policy and the U.S. Response*, published by AIN and WOLA in June 2006, and Youngers and Ledebur, *Update on Drug Policy Issues in Bolivia*, 7 November 2006.

<sup>3</sup> The 2005 figure was 26,500 hectares. In addition to stating the 2006 coca estimate as a range, ONDCP included an estimated range for 2005 of 21,400 to 32,500 hectares. The 2005 and 2006 estimates are nearly identical.

<sup>4</sup> On May 14, 2007, ONDCP’s *2006 Counternarcotics Assessment for Peru* also reported the area under coca cultivation as a range (31,000 to 42,800 hectares). Unlike the Bolivia assessment, ONDCP’s latest Peru assessment does not provide a

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point estimate for either 2005 or 2006, and does not provide a range for 2005.  
<http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/news/press07/051407.html>.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of State, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, March 2007,  
<http://www.state.gov/p/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2007/vol1>.

<sup>6</sup> ONDCP, *2006 Counternarcotics Assessment for Peru*, 14 May 2007.  
<http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/news/press07/051407.html>.

<sup>7</sup> ONDCP, *2005 Coca Cultivation and Cocaine Production Estimates for Bolivia*, 21 November 2005.

<sup>8</sup> See U.S. Department of State, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, March 2006,  
<http://www.state.gov/p/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2006/vol1> and Ledebur and Youngers, *Crisis or Opportunity? Bolivian Drug Control Policy and the U.S. Response*, published by AIN and WOLA in June 2006.

<sup>9</sup> ONDCP, *2005 Coca Cultivation and Cocaine Production Estimates for Bolivia*, 21 November 2005.

<sup>10</sup> The State Department often adjusts its cultivation figures from previous years, without explanation. For example, the 2006 INCSR had reported coca cultivation for the year 2000 as having been 14,600 hectares, but the 2007 INCSR reported 19,600 hectares for the year 2000, a 34 percent increase for which no explanation was given. Similarly, whereas the 2006 INCSR reported 21,600 hectares of coca in Bolivia for 2002, the 2007 INCSR reported 24,400 hectares for 2002, a 13 percent increase for which no explanation was given.

<sup>11</sup> The 2007 INCSR did not include coca cultivation figures; these were published on April 25, 2007, in ONDCP's *2006 Counternarcotics Assessment for Bolivia*. Rather than provide a single figure for hectares under cultivation, as has been the case in all previous INCSR and ONDCP reports, the April 2007 statement provided a range for both the 2005 and 2006 figures. For these charts, the figure 26,500 has been used for both years, though the range for 2005 (21,000 to 32,500 hectares) is slightly larger than the range given for 2006 (21,400 to 32,500 hectares).

<sup>12</sup> 2007 INCSR.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> The original Spanish reads: "Estamos conscientes también de un interés más grande entre los narcotraficantes en Bolivia, como resultado de un aumento de coca."