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A Plan Colombia for Victims: How a focus on victims will contribute to achieving US policy goals

How effective has US funding to Colombia been since 2000?

The first Plan Colombia was presented to the US Congress as a six-year plan to improve human rights, support the rule of law, promote a peaceful end to the internal conflict, and reduce coca cultivation in Colombia. During this period, roughly 80% of US funding has gone to Colombia's security forces. Although over \$5 billion has been spent, Colombia's conflict rages on: the number of internally displaced persons has grown to well over 3 million, two guerrilla groups remain active, and despite the paramilitary demobilization, the OAS has documented continuing activity of these groups in 23 of Colombia's 32 departments. According to US government figures, more coca was grown in Colombia in 2005 than when Plan Colombia began in 2000. Finally, between July 2002 and June 2006, a total of 11,292 persons were registered as assassinated or disappeared: responsibility has been attributed to paramilitaries in 61% of cases, to guerrilla groups in 25% and to the government in 14% of cases. These figures show that US funding under the first Plan Colombia has brought us no closer to stated U.S. policy goals.

Why would a Plan Colombia for Victims be more effective than the current US assistance package?

Progress toward peace, the rule of law, and an end to the illegal drug economy in Colombia requires that an effective justice system, adequate civilian governance, and sustainable development alternatives are firmly established. While security is a necessary component, the overemphasis on funding security forces has left the civilian governance system weak and has limited the possibilities for establishing effective alternative development programs to assist farmers in planting and marketing legal crops instead of coca. A Plan Colombia for Victims would focus on eliminating impunity, supporting reparation and justice for the nation's millions of victims, decreasing violent conflict and strengthening the rule of law. It would provide economic assistance for Colombia's over 3 million internally displaced. It would ensure that victims of paramilitary violence in Colombia have adequate legal representation and that they are protected from threats being made to silence their testimony. It would allow for full and impartial investigation of crimes committed by paramilitary groups and of the links these groups have/had with the military and with high-level politicians.

Recommendations

- ***US assistance should be restructured to rebalance the 80/20% split between security and economic aid to a more effective package, with the majority of funding destined for economic, social and justice programs.***
- ***Members of Congress should ensure that the appropriations legislation for 2008 increases protection and humanitarian aid for internally displaced persons, for strengthening the justice system, and to guarantee the land rights of Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities.***
- ***This could be financed by shifting from existing budget categories ('06 figures): \$211.7 million for aircraft maintenance, because the Colombian government should assume these costs; \$81.7 million for aerial fumigation, because it is a failed strategy; and \$89.1 million for foreign military financing, given the Colombian military's troubled human rights record.***
- ***Members of Congress should advocate for assistance that ensures adequate security for witnesses, victims, judges and prosecutors; provides forensic and investigative technology; guarantees that stolen lands are returned; and trains and employs many more competent lawyers to ensure that millions of victims have access to quality legal representation.***

