

**Statement of Chairman Tom Davis**  
**Committee on Government Reform**  
**Hearing on “The War Against Drugs and Thugs: A Status Report on Plan Colombia**  
**Successes and Remaining Challenges”**  
**June 17, 2004**

Good morning. I want to welcome everyone to today’s oversight hearing on Plan Colombia, an important component of U.S. foreign and counternarcotics policy. Today we’ll examine the U.S. Government’s support and contributions to the progress being made in Colombia in fighting drug trafficking and international crime, and in improving economic and social conditions.

Since its inception in 1999, Plan Colombia has been an integrated strategy to meet the most pressing challenges confronting the country today—promoting the peace process, combating narcoterrorism, reviving the economy, and strengthening the democratic pillars of society. The combined efforts of several of our government agencies, who are here testifying today, are providing assistance to meet these challenges and improve the stability and future of Colombia.

Not only is Colombia one of the oldest democracies in our hemisphere, but it also is home to three terrorist groups who fund their guerilla activities with drugs smuggled into the U.S. for American consumption. Colombia is a significant source of cocaine and heroin for the U.S. market. As many of us are well aware, the drug trade has a terrible and destructive impact on Americans through addiction, drug-related crimes, and death. Because drug trafficking and the guerilla insurgency have become intertwined problems, Congress has granted the U.S. expanded authority and increased flexibility to fight narcoterrorism and reduce the flow of illicit drugs into the U.S.

I led three congressional delegations to Colombia last year and can say firsthand that our significant investment, after years of effort, is beginning to see returns on the time, money, and resources spent in Colombia. Together with the strong commitment of President Alvaro Uribe and historic levels of support from the Colombian people, U.S. involvement is beginning to hit narcoterrorists where it hurts.

Some European left wing politicians and human rights groups claim the Uribe Administration has failed to honor commitments on human rights. They’ve also criticized new Colombian anti-terrorism laws passed in December. But I think the view from Bogotá looks very different, and I think the European left may be guilty of clinging to an overly romantic, naïve opinion of the guerillas. The mask is off the Lone Ranger. These are not idealistic liberators; they’re thugs and terrorists, funded by the illicit drug trade.

The fact is, President Uribe continues to enjoy unprecedented support from the Colombian people because his no-nonsense strategy is producing results. He’s popular because Colombians feel safer. Men, women, and children once afraid to hit the road to visit family and friends for fear of kidnapping or worse are now doing so. A publicly

recognized state presence now extends to towns and villages that for decades had been rebel territory.

We are seeing tremendous results in illegal crop eradication, and Plan Colombia's efforts have produced record reductions in coca production and in the destruction of drug labs. Net coca production in Colombia dropped from 355,347 acres in 2002 to 280,071 acres in 2003, a stunning 33 percent decline from the peak-growing year of 2001. Interdiction efforts by the Government of Colombia have increased significantly and each week brings news of new seizures of cocaine and heroin—interdictions that are usually the result of U.S. supplied intelligence. Eradication, coupled with increasingly successful interdiction efforts, is a key to our war on narcoterrorism, reducing profitability and slowly but surely leading farmers to abandon coca in favor of other, legitimate crops. Ultimately that, in turn, will mean less cocaine on American streets.

Criminals who have remained at large for years are being captured and extradited to the U.S. for prosecution. Colombia extradited 90 suspects to the United States in the first 16 months of the Uribe Administration – quite an accomplishment considering that five years ago it offered up just one of its citizens to the U.S. justice system. The extraditions illustrate the unprecedented cooperation and partnership between our two nations, and the fact that public opinion on extradition in Colombia has changed, due largely to the political will and persistence of President Uribe.

Last month Attorney General Ashcroft announced the indictment of nine top leaders of Colombia's largest drug cartel, an organization responsible for as much as half of all the cocaine smuggled into the United States. This cartel had exported more than 1.2 million pounds of cocaine to the U.S. through Mexico since 1990, a load worth more than \$10 billion. To put that number in perspective, it's approximately the combined annual budgets of the FBI, DEA, and Bureau of Prisons.

Our continued support of Colombia's unified campaign against drug trafficking and terrorist activities and their effort to obtain democratic security is a wise investment. Although U.S. assistance to the Colombian Government has led to meaningful signs of success under the strong leadership of President Uribe, challenges do remain. Complete realization of U.S. policy goals requires a concerted Colombian strategy and effort sustained by continuous U.S. assistance. Our panels of witnesses today will provide an update on the current status of U.S.-Colombian programs, progress that has been made in recent years, and an assessment of remaining challenges in the war against narcoterrorism. I look forward to our discussion today, and I again want to welcome our witnesses and their important testimony.