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His Excellency Secretary General José Miguel Insulza
Organization of American States
Washington, DC

Dear Mr. Secretary-General:

The Government of Ecuador has [presented](#) to you a formal protest against the aerial herbicide fumigations that Colombia is carrying out on its side of both countries' common border. The OAS Permanent Council will be considering Ecuador's claim today.

The Organization of American States can play an active role in defusing the current diplomatic crisis between the two countries. The OAS can also use this opportunity to initiate a larger discussion of strategies that more effectively reduce the damage done by illicit drugs, and drug-related violence, throughout the hemisphere.

Ecuador's complaint should receive serious consideration. Today's debate is the latest step in a diplomatic crisis that began over a month ago. In early December, Colombia began aerially spraying "Round-Up Ultra" - a concentrated form of the herbicide glyphosate with other chemical surfactants - over coca-producing areas just over the border from Ecuador. Colombia took this step despite strong and repeated entreaties from the Ecuadorian government that spraying not occur in the border zone due to health and environmental concerns. The spraying is also occurring despite Colombia's assent, given in January 2006, to an Ecuadorian request not to spray within ten kilometers of the border.

Ecuador's government - both the outgoing administration of Alfredo Palacio and President-elect Rafael Correa, who takes office on the 15th - have strongly protested the renewed spraying. The damage done to bilateral relations is significant, as Ecuador has withdrawn its ambassador and Colombian President Álvaro Uribe has not indicated whether he will attend President-elect Correa's inauguration.

As the OAS considers this increasingly urgent issue, please recall the following three points about the aerial herbicide fumigation program in Colombia, the only country in the world that allows such a program. (Peru and Bolivia eradicate coca by hand.)

- **Reasonable doubts remain about the health and environmental impacts** of aerially sprayed "Round-Up Ultra." A 2005 [study](#) by the OAS Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD) found that the spray program had few negative environmental impacts, with the exception of spraying over areas of shallow standing water. Subsequent studies, however, have found that the spray mixture exhibits significant levels of toxicity for amphibians. [Critics](#) of the CICAD study [question](#) its measurement of "spray-drift" on non-target vegetation. The study also neglects to note a key secondary environmental cost: the marked tendency of coca-growers, in the absence of access to development assistance, to cut down new forest and re-plant the crop elsewhere.
- **Indiscriminate spraying** remains a problem. Planes routinely pass over residences and small rural settlements. Spray drift is common, and the killing of legal food crops - even when no coca is present, and even in the case of some alternative development programs - continues to be [denounced](#) on a frequent basis. Between 2001 and June of

2004, the Colombian Police [recorded](#) 4,535 complaints of sprayed legal crops - many of them likely invalid, but many others probably well-founded.

- After over a decade in Colombia, **fumigation has not proved to be an effective coca supply-reduction strategy**. U.S. State Department [statistics](#) show no change in the amount of coca grown in the Andes during the past twenty years, and show more coca in Colombia in 2005 than in 2000, the year that spraying surged with the launch of "Plan Colombia." UN estimates showed about a one-quarter reduction in regional coca-growing between 2000 and 2003, but even this gain has stagnated, and begun to reverse, in subsequent years.

An increasing body of [studies](#) is pointing the way to a more effective way to reduce the costs to our societies exacted by illicit drugs. They recommend strategies that combine demand reduction in consuming countries - especially access to treatment for addicts - with improved governance in producing countries' neglected rural zones. Spraying glyphosate is a poor substitute.

With the leadership of the Organization of American States, the current crisis between Colombia and Ecuador must be brought to a speedy diplomatic resolution. This crisis, though, should not simply end up being papered over, only to flare up again the next time that spraying in the border zone re-initiates.

The OAS, led by the office of the Secretary General and CICAD, could play an important and creative role in making this crisis a first step toward a hemispheric search toward a new, more effective strategy. Before the next crisis unfolds, it is time to ask some difficult questions about what is working, what is not, and how results can be better achieved through cooperation, not confrontation.

Thank you for your consideration. Let us hope for a constructive discussion during today's session.

Sincerely,



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