

Drug Legalization Is the Next Phase of Colombia's 'Peace Process'

by Valerie Rush

Colombia's drug-trafficking FARC terrorists, together with the government of President Andrés Pastrana, are sponsoring a June 29-30 international conference on "Illegal Crops and the Environment," to be held in the heart of the FARC-controlled "Coca Republic," also known as "FARClandia," in southern Colombia. That conference, which will be attended by delegates from more than a score of European and Ibero-American countries, is designed to confront the United States government with a "world consensus" in favor of drug legalization, as an "alternative" to a U.S.-backed military war on drugs, which at least some in Washington, including White House drug policy adviser Gen. Barry McCaffrey (ret.), still favor.

As part of the June 29-30 conference, the delegates will be treated to FARC-escorted tours of the surrounding coca-growing region, lectured on the horrors of drug-eradication techniques, permitted to "dialogue" with a hand-picked delegation of coca-farmers, and urged to finance a FARC-run pilot project of "crop substitution."

In the forefront of this scenario is London's puppet government in Canada, which has already announced that it will send its ambassador in Colombia to the conference. Indeed, at the same time that Canadian Ambassador Guillermo Rishchynski has admitted that his attendance "implies a certain level of recognition for the FARC," Canadian Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy is deploying into Peru, to undermine the sole government on the continent which has successfully defeated narco-terrorism there.

'Investing' in the Coca Republic

This phase of the drug-legalization strategy was publicly launched back in late March of this year, when the FARC issued a call to the U.S. government to endorse global drug legalization as an answer to the illegal drug trade and its attendant evils. The FARC proposed that delegations from the U.S. Congress be sent to Colombia to speak with FARC leaders, to tour the country's vast coca plantations, and to talk directly to Colombian coca-farmers about their "crops."

In fact, this strategy was more quietly set into motion last summer, when Richard Grasso, the president of the New York Stock Exchange, flew down to FARClandia to discuss mutual "investment scenarios" with FARC leader Raúl Reyes.

Grasso's visit, fully blessed by Madeleine Albright's U.S. State Department, opened up the Coca Republic for a pilgrimage by prominent international business magnates, all of them simultaneously offering olive branches and "investment opportunities" to the murderous FARC narco-terrorists.

When did the FARC get transformed from a narco-terrorist army of assassins, kidnapers, and extortionists, into an "investment opportunity" for London and Wall Street financiers? The answer: When the FARC took over Colombia's cocaine and heroin trade as the country's Third Cartel. All that was needed was a little whitewash, eagerly supplied by President Pastrana.

Indeed, since last year, the FARC has been boosted into a position of dual power with the Pastrana government. A tour of Europe by a joint FARC-government delegation earlier this year lent the narco-terrorists a veneer of respectability abroad, even as they have continued to blackmail the nation with escalating terrorism. The FARC announcement of a 10% "tax" on all Colombians with assets of more than \$1 million, to finance "the war against the state," triggered an uproar among Colombia's entrepreneurial class, but government "peace negotiators" in FARClandia barely raised an eyebrow. Last month's decapitation by a "necklace bomb," of a woman farmer who had refused to pay FARC protection money, caused an outpouring of demands for an end to Pastrana's farcical "peace process." A panicky President Pastrana was forced to suspend the international conference plans, until a neighbor with a grudge was suddenly "discovered" to be the culprit behind the murder. The conference was quickly reinstated.

The FARC has intensified its international diplomacy, with the dual purpose of making recognition of its status as a "belligerent" under the Geneva Convention a *fait accompli*, and to drum up support for its drug-legalization proposal. In May, Colombian government officials travelled with FARC representatives to Spain and Norway, where they won commitments from those governments to serve as "facilitators" for the June 29-30 drug conference in FARClandia.

In early June, FARC "ambassador" Raúl Reyes attended a seminar on Colombia's "peace process" at Spain's University of Alcalá de Henares. European non-governmental organizations and members of the European Parliament met with

Reyes to map out a strategy for political and financial support for the FARC, under the cover of “alternative development” programs in areas under FARC control. During his speech at the Spanish conference, Italian parliamentarian Roman Montovani gave away the show by declaring outright that the solution to Colombia’s problems is to develop a market for “new” agricultural products, and to support the worldwide fight for drug legalization!

The University of Alcalá meeting fed into a June 19 meeting in London, which will in turn feed into a July 4-5 meeting in Madrid, where non-U.S. donors to Pastrana’s proposed multibillion-dollar “Plan Colombia” will be given responsibility for blocking the military (i.e., U.S.) component of the aid package, in favor of Colombian “social reform” — in other words, the FARC program of “crop substitution” and “human rights” for terrorists.

The latest diplomatic foray of the FARC’s Reyes has been to Venezuela and Mexico, where he is seeking an official commitment for them to send delegates to the late-June FARClandia conference. In Venezuela, Reyes met privately with President Hugo Chávez, whose pre-election political movement had shared membership in the pro-terrorist São Paulo Forum with the FARC. Chávez endorsed the goals of the FARC’s recently launched “Bolivarian Movement” as his own, but was then forced to publicly deny charges, issued by his own former director of the Venezuelan political police, Jesús Urdaneta, that the Chávez government had funnelled money and weapons to the FARC insurgency next door.

A Growing Resistance

The FARC’s increasingly brazen actions, both at home and abroad, may have the endorsement of the Colombian government, but not of its people. The repeated outcry by millions of Colombians to each new atrocity committed by the FARC, bears witness to the quiet but growing resistance to President Andrés “Neville Chamberlain” Pastrana’s appeasement policy toward the narco-terrorists.

On June 10, more than 2,000 Colombians from around the country came to Bogotá for a meeting of the Fuerza Colombia Movement, led by retired Armed Forces Commander Gen. Harold Bedoya Pizarro. Joining Bedoya at the podium were representatives of the peasant rebellion in a five-province region of north-central Colombia, which has thus far prevented the Pastrana government from giving away yet another piece of national territory, this time to the National Liberation Army (ELN) narco-terrorists.

With the Colombian flag in his hand, Bedoya called for the organization of a nationwide resistance movement: “We must wage a war for a second independence,” he said. “We are practically at the brink of national dissolution. Let us not fear those who are evil and corrupt, but rather, indifference.” He especially called on the Colombian Armed Forces to be vigilant, and to not allow the dismembering of the national territory.

Bedoya also praised Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori for his courage in confronting narco-terrorism, an attitude of admiration which is widespread among Colombians. In fact, when the Peruvian President appeared at the recent heads of state meeting of the Rio Group in Cartagena, Colombia, he was greeted with an ovation by many of the Colombians present. During an interview with the Colombian daily *El Tiempo*, Fujimori was asked to comment on the applause: “I interpret it as the desire to achieve peace and tranquility in Colombia. I have heard ‘Fujimori, we need you’ in the streets here, and similar expressions. And I believe that in Colombia, there can be different ideas on how to achieve peace.”

In his June 10 speech, Bedoya likened the Colombian ruling elites’ situation to “the *Titanic*, where people were dancing as the ship was sinking,” an image which was also picked up by Colombian newspaper columnist Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza, who wrote on June 22 that his country is “sinking like the *Titanic*, while the crew throw plates at each other.”

Apuleyo Mendoza went on: “The picture is black. Encouraged by all they have received without giving anything in return, we have a very well-armed guerrilla movement which has a presence in 876 townships in the country, controls the entire south, and receives more than a billion dollars a year through cocaine, kidnapping, and extortion. It assaults, assassinates, and kidnaps, and calls this a peace process. . . . Its political branch moves its pawns in Congress, the press, the justice system, the prosecutor’s office, and by using ‘human rights,’ is in a position to ruin the careers of the Armed Forces’ best officers, through unfounded accusations.”

However, for most Colombians, merely attending a meeting in Colombia such as Bedoya’s takes courage. Many other Colombians are acting as if three or four parallel governments rule their country, and they must get permission from each for any local or national project they seek to undertake. Exemplary of this generalized terror, was the recent trip of the president of the Federation of Colombian Municipalities, Gilberto Toro, first to the headquarters of the “left-wing” FARC narco-terrorists, and then to that of Carlos Castrano’s “right-wing” narco-terrorists in the Self-Defense Units of Colombia, to beg both groups to stop assassinating mayors, so that mayoral elections can be held as scheduled later this year!

The “official” government has simply abandoned the mayors. There are more than 190 townships without any public protection (police or military), and some 500 — almost half the towns and cities in the country — are under constant assault by one or another narco-terrorist gang. In January 1999, the government ended the life insurance policy it had provided mayors; the private insurance companies also refuse to insure them, because a mayor is considered a walking dead man.

The pressure is such that some candidates have sent the FARC e-mail messages, asking permission to campaign. The FARC has replied that they must come to the FARC-controlled territory in the south, lay out their plans, and then we “will decide if we approve or reject you.”