

Colombia's Agent Green Counterproposal Released



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- **Ecuador Alarm Highlights Regional Concerns**
- **United Nations Agencies Asked to Intervene**

Hamburg and Seattle, 18 July – To clarify contradictory and confusing press reports surrounding the proposed use of biological weapons in Colombia, the Sunshine Project is making available on its website the text of the Colombian Environment Ministry's diplomatic response to the USA's bid to use a *Fusarium oxysporum* biological weapon to kill Colombia's illicit coca crop.

The Project will seek the intervention of United Nations agencies to prevent biological weapons use in Colombia and other parts of Latin America and Asia – all of which are targets of the US global plan to use biological weapons on drug crops.

The Project is also strongly supporting initiatives by the nonprofit *Acción Ecológica* in Ecuador to explore the possibility that biological weapons use in Colombia would violate regional cooperation agreements. Today in Quito fears of spillover effects from use of biological weapons in Colombia have catapulted the issue to the front pages. In response, the US Ambassador has called an emergency press conference.

Secret Negotiating Document Posted to Internet

The 21 page Spanish language Colombian Environment Ministry paper, dated May 30th, is a project proposal to conduct a domestic research program on biological mechanisms to kill coca plants. The secret document was leaked when it was distributed among Colombian and other officials for analysis. The document has been mentioned in many recent press reports; but has not yet been analyzed by the media.

The Colombian proposal is the basis of current negotiations between the Vienna-based United Nations Drug Control Program (UNDCP) and the Government to conduct US-funded biological agent research. The proposal is draped in ambiguous language and leaves room for interpretation in many areas. The proposal clearly reflects that many officials in the Colombian government are struggling to stop the US plan; but are under tremendous pressure to allow biological weapons. The component of the proposal dealing with biological agents, however, is explicit that testing and evaluation of the biological weapons potential of domestic organisms will be conducted.

A previous press release by the Sunshine Project outlined severe weaknesses in the proposal, particularly related to the weapons research, biosafety, civil society and indigenous peoples' participation, and the lack of involvement of appropriate regional and international organizations. Civil society groups are concerned that Colombia's Environment Ministry is taking on the job of developing biological agents rather than independently reviewing their impacts.

The actual implementation of the biological weapons research is obviously conditional on the final, signed version of the contract with UNDCP.

It appears likely that UNDCP and the US will continue to claim that if they can find minute quantities of a crop-killing disease in Colombia, that this creates a substantially different situation than if the biological weapons were an introduced strain. This artificial distinction has no logical basis. Natural occurrence of small quantities of a pathogenic microbe cannot be equated with the deliberate and massive provocation of disease epidemics. All biological weapons, except

those that are genetically engineered (the US has developed such fusarium) or bred, are found in nature. Examples include ebola (Africa), hantaviruses (USA), and rice blast (Asia).

By distributing the Colombian document, the Project also hopes to show that the debate over use of the specific "EN4" *Fusarium oxysporum* agent developed by the US Government only covers one aspect of the potential for bioweapons use. The Colombian proposal also discusses other biological weapons possibilities. In fact, the US-proposed use of Fusaria to control coca in Colombia is only one part of a global plan. The US is also supporting the development of other fungal and viral agents to kill narcotic crops of opium poppy and marijuana. While the proposed use of Colombia as a proving ground for the US biological weapons technology is a very important case, it is also important to remember that it is only one instance of a global plan to use biological weapons in the drug war.

Regional and International Concerns

The necessity of international action has been dramatically underscored by events in the past two days in Ecuador, where there has been an outpouring of concern that testing and use of biological weapons in Colombia would have spillover effects, especially in the biodiverse Putumayo River region. Today the US Ambassador in Quito called an emergency press conference on the issue and to address allegations that US researchers may have secretly applied the fungus in the Ecuadorean Province of Sucumbios. Quito-based nonprofit Acción Ecológica has called for an urgent regional consultation of civil society and legislators to address the biological weapons, particularly to discuss international ramifications and if testing and use in Colombia violates Andean Community decisions.

The Sunshine Project will ask several United Nations agencies to take action to stop the US effort. The Project has begun a process to contact officials and government delegates to UN groups, each of which have relevant concerns. The Project will ask officials to stop the use of biological agents in the drug war and to reinforce the global ban on environmental and crop biological warfare. The UN groups asked to be involved include the United Nations High Commission on Human Rights (UNHCHR), World Health Organization (WHO), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP).

The Colombian Government document is available on the Sunshine Project website at <http://www.sunshine-project.de>. The document is entirely unedited except for the removal, for security reasons, of the names of persons identified as potential Colombian investigators in the program.

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