

Eight Myths About the War on Drugs



**American Friends
Service Committee**

Quaker values in action

1 The war on drugs makes drugs harder to get in the United States.

The price of cocaine and heroin on U.S. streets is the same as it was before Plan Colombia began. Drugs are as available, and as pure, as they were before 2000. Supply is meeting demand as much as ever. The supply-reduction strategy has been a failure.



*Afro-Colombian children,
Photo by: Nina Laboy, AFSC Staff.*

4 The war on drugs discourages people from trafficking, selling, and producing drugs or cultivating coca.

The war against drugs increases the profits from drugs because it makes them harder to obtain. For poor people in Latin America and other extremely poor parts of the world, drug production and sale become a way of surviving when other ways of making a living are not available.



*Afro-Colombian youth explain how they are discriminated against because of the war on drugs.
Photo: Nina Laboy, AFSC Staff.*

2 The war on drugs helps keep communities of color in the United States safe.

Regardless of similar or equal levels of drug use during pregnancy, black women are 10 times more likely than white women to be reported to child welfare agencies for prenatal drug use. Black and Hispanic children are also more likely to have a parent in prison.

Human Rights Watch reports that studies have shown that the nation's war on drugs has overwhelmingly singled out blacks — even though most drug offenders are white. Researchers found that 62.7% of the drug offenders admitted to state prisons are black and black men are sent to state prisons on drug charges at 13 times the rate of white men.

3 A good drug policy is policy that outlaws the use of drugs.

Many people in a diversity of communities are in need of help because of their dependency on drugs. Each individual in these communities lives their dependency under very specific circumstances. AFSC believes that criminalizing the use of drugs is not the only solution to the problem that is why each of these people requires a specific response to their specific situation.

Because various drugs pose different risks, individual responses are required to the drugs used in today's society. Harm reduction strategies meet drug users "where they're at," addressing conditions of use along with the use itself.

Harm reduction is a set of practical strategies that reduce negative consequences of drug use, incorporating a spectrum of strategies from safer use to managed use to abstinence.

Harm reduction also provides a strategy that focuses away from law enforcement and interdiction toward the idea that reducing consumption will help to stem profitability and therefore the flow and production of controlled drugs.

5 Spraying deadly chemicals on coca leaves stops cultivation.

Since large scale fumigation began in 1996, coca cultivation in the Andes region has remained stable. While there is some reduction of cultivation in the fumigated areas, studies have not accounted for cultivation that springs up in other areas. More importantly, the negative effects the chemicals have on people, the environment, and plant and animal species of the Amazon forest are not dealt with in a responsible manner.

Eight Myths About the War on Drugs



**American Friends
Service Committee**

Quaker values in action

6

Expanding the war on drugs to include the war on terror will decrease the ability of terrorists to profit from drugs.

Trying to limit the supply of drugs while there is high demand will only increase the price of drugs and therefore the profits to be made from selling, producing, or trafficking in drugs. Intensifying the war on drugs in Colombia has only increased the amount of money armed groups can make from illegal production and sale of drugs.

Meanwhile, in the U.S. there are attempts to expand the Patriot Act to include the war on drugs. This version of the Act would be called the Vital Interdiction of Criminal Terrorist Organizations Act (VICTORY Act). The VICTORY Act would represent a major expansion of laws that allow the government to conduct surveillance, asset forfeiture, racial profiling and other powers under the guise of the terrorism threat.



Afro-Colombian leaders explain how US funded militarization has uprooted many Afro-Colombian communities. Photo: Nina Laboy, AFSC Staff.



Indigenous and Afro-Colombian leaders are targeted and assassinated by the military, guerrillas and illegally armed paramilitary groups. Photo: Nina Laboy.

7

The war on drugs helps protect Colombians.

The Colombian government has failed to prosecute high ranking army officials when they violate human rights. Many of the violations are often carried out with the complicity of illegal paramilitary groups, who are classified as terrorists by the State Department. Despite these reports the U.S. continues to pour hundreds of millions of dollars into funding the Colombian military.

8

The war on drugs in Colombia reduces the flow of drugs into The United States.

The war on drugs has not succeeded in reducing the flow of drugs into the United States. The United Nations estimates that only 10-15% of heroin and 30% of cocaine is intercepted worldwide. At least 70% of international drug shipments need to be intercepted to substantially reduce the industry. U.S. State Department reports suggest that there has been an increase in successful interceptions. However, the drug market continues to produce the same, or even higher, quantities of illicit drugs.



Children bear the brunt of the violence. Photo, Nina Laboy, AFSC Staff.

**For more information contact us at: colombia@afsc.org
1501 Cherry Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
or visit our website at: www.afsc.org**