

Towards the First Global Forum of Producers of Crops Declared to be Illicit

The International Promotion Committee, founded in the city of Valencia, Spain, at the end of March 2007, would like to draw your attention to the following general considerations:

Heroin, cocaine and cannabis, the best-known illegal drugs causing concern to the international community, are all produced on the basis of plants: the opium poppy for heroin, the coca bush for cocaine and cannabis for marijuana or hashish. Peasant communities in Asia, Africa and Latin America are the main producers of these crops, which occupy considerable areas of land. According to UN figures, in 2006 the illicit cultivation of opium poppy covered 202,000 hectares, mainly in Asia, an estimated 165,000 of which are in Afghanistan. The coca leaf extends over an estimated 160,000 hectares in three Andean countries (2005), half of which can be found in Colombia alone. On cannabis, without any doubt the most widely cultivated illicit crop, UN figures for 2004/2005 haphazardly point to 230,000 hectares worldwide, with Morocco alone accounting for about 72,000 hectares. On a global scale, and for decades now, millions of people are sustained or survive on the basis of the agricultural production of these “plants for drugs”, even though they gain the fewest resources from the drug trafficking chain.

These “criminalised peasants” cannot be considered as a marginal and passing phenomena. They form an integral part of 21st century reality as much as other permanent global problems. The nature of this particular agricultural activity could not be more paradoxical: illicit drugs are, more than any other product, part of a global economy, although their cultivation results from local configurations that, while differing in degree, combine to a remarkable extent particular geographical conditions (especially in mountain regions), social isolation, political violence and economic underdevelopment.

According to the international conventions on drugs, the agricultural production of these plants is restricted to medicinal and scientific purposes. As a consequence, states never guarantee human rights for the peasants that grow these crops not destined to such use. Poor and defenceless, these peasants are among the most unprotected members of this global economy since, in many cases, they are subjected to the rule of irregular armed groups and/or corrupt officials. Moreover, they are often stigmatised as criminals by authorities and society as a whole.

Subordinated amongst the subordinated, these “gardeners of artificial paradises” organise in order to claim their rights, like respect for cultural uses and licit derivatives. The majority of them don't reach the same level of approval that has been achieved by the Andean coca peasant organisations. Their protests are often paid for with blood.

Until now, the international community's responses have not delivered their expected results: the elimination or significant and permanent reduction of illicit crops. The goals of Alternative Development programmes have, with a few exceptions, not been met. Forced crop eradication has not been effective either, and, particularly in places where aerial spraying has been applied, notably in Colombia, environmental damage and human health problems have been inflicted. This failure is quantifiable: in almost fifteen years the agricultural output of source plant material for illicit drugs production has multiplied. Forced eradication is leading to humanitarian disasters.

The population involved in the growing of illicit plants are not consulted by the national and international decision making bodies, and their voice is not taken into account while designing strategies – from which they are supposed to benefit - to find a way out of this

dramatic situation. At the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, the legislative entity of UN drugs control, these voices are hardly ever considered. There are few countries where trade unions of illicit crop producers exist, although in one exceptional case (Bolivia) a peasant leader of the “cocaleros” was elected president. Some relations have been developed amongst these trade unions in the Andes, but they have no contact whatsoever with those peasant communities who grow poppy and cannabis in other continents. In most cases these communities are geographically isolated, politically marginalised and dispersed.

2008 is the target date agreed at the UN General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) for tackling the world drug problem. In 1998, the world community decided to eliminate or significantly reduce all illicit crops within a period of ten years. This will be a moment to draw up a balance sheet of the actions undertaken, and define new future strategies in response to this. The population involved in the cultivation of illicit plants for drugs should have an important role in this process.

Objectives of the Forum:

The First Global Forum of Producers of Crops Declared to be Illicit, which is proposed to be held at the end of February 2008, would like to facilitate the producers to:

Exchange and inform each other and the outside world about the political and economic problems pushing these peasant communities towards this kind of agriculture.

Tackle the questions surrounding these people’s future: equal and sustainable development of their rural and territorial economies, agrarian reforms, alternative development and the development of licit uses of these plants (medicine, cultural and nutritional).

Generate proposals of different policies to be presented to the official decision making bodies.

Facilitate and connect associations and networks capable of linking authorities and national, regional and international entities as actors defining their own development.

The First Global Forum of Producers of Crops Declared to be Illicit intends to gather farmers that are affected by current policies. We are aware of the fact that the legal status of their activity is a limitation, so presence of other actors involved in the context of the local rural economy is needed. Local or international development agencies, community representatives, experts and researchers are also invited to share their insights and present their points of view.

The conclusions and recommendations of this First Global Forum will need to be taken into account when governments and the international community design new policy strategies. Policies that preserve for people the right to maintain their livelihoods in a sustainable way, and that go beyond the false premise that by attacking poor farmers the global drug problem will be resolved.

The International Promotion Committee of this First Global Forum of Producers of Crops Declared to be Illicit (GFPCDI) want to call on international organisations, associations and trade unions, governments and civil society in general, to acknowledge the seriousness of the situation of affected populations by supporting this initiative.

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