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STOP the war in Colombia!

STOP US military intervention!

STOP biological warfare!

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The war in Colombia will certainly spill over to other countries of the region, in fact it has already provoked the extension of the operations of the paramilitaries and all the other actors of the conflict beyond the Colombian borders into Panama, Venezuela, Brasil, Peru and Ecuador. The US army has already built new military basis all over the region specifically for the Colombia Plan, including the largest US military basis of Latin America in Manta (Ecuador) and many other basis in countries as far apart as El Salvador. They have also received permission from the Dutch government to use the military basis in the Dutch colony of Curacao (in the Venezuelan coast) to bomb the region. This whole shit is a remake of the Vietnam war, but this time with extensive use of genetically modified biological weapons and a much deeper involvement of European governments and companies. In another message you will find an excellent summary of the discussions that took place in Prague about the Colombia Plan and the campaign ideas, done by some folks in Bristol (with the help of an article on the issue by Chomsky).

At the S26 demonstrations against the IMF and World Bank in Prague, community leaders from the Black Autonomous Communities of Colombia were present, as were their companeros from Bolivia, Ecuador, Honduras and Panama. Coming from some of the poorest areas in Latin America, they told a tale of repression, ethnocide and ecocide. Of a war being waged against them under the guise of the USA's "War on Drugs". Of community leaders massacred by government-backed CIA trained paramilitaries. Of mass displacements and disappearances. What happens after displacement? Time for the good old US-based multinationals to move in. Sound familiar?

PLAN COLOMBIA

In 1999, Colombia became the leading recipient of U.S. military and police assistance. Clinton's recently approved Colombia Plan escalates this situation, with a \$1.6 billion "emergency aid" package - mostly in the form of military aid. The EU is also participating in the Colombia Plan.

Columbia has had an ongoing civil war for over three decades. Quite predictably, the announcement of the Colombia Plan led to counter measures by the guerrillas. This will lead to military escalation, rather than peace.

The Colombia Plan is officially justified in terms of the "drug war". However, the targets of the Colombia Plan are the guerrilla forces based and the peasantry and indigenous people who are calling for internal social change. This would interfere with how the States want Colombia integrated into its neoliberal plans for world domination and corporate expropriation of Colombia's valuable resources, including oil.

It's the same old story with the usual suspects. Multinationals, backed by Western governments and the World Bank and IMF are rubbing their greedy hands over their plans for Colombia. With privatisation of national industries, water and power utilities and the opportunity to steal lots of land off the locals - they have a lot of money to make. The people who oppose this become the real targets of US-backed oppression. The reports coming out tell the horrors of CIA trained paramilitaries who seem to have graduated with flying colours from the School Of Americas. Chopping up people in massacres, cutting unborn children from their still-living mothers wombs, violent scenes of torture and death. The message to the communities is clear: "Mess with us, and this is what you'll get."

When scrutinising Plan Colombia, we should ask a few questions. If the US wants to give alternatives, other from the drug

industry, to the Colombian people, then why does the Plan include only token funding for alternative crops? If Clinton is serious about attacking the drug lords (narcos), why do the counterinsurgency battalions target and attack the weakest and most socially fragile link of the drug chain: the production by peasants, settlers and indigenous people? Why is more not done back home to stamp out drugs in the States, oh, and why is Uncle Sam not too bothered about stopping the money from the drug trade ending up in US coffers - 90 per cent of "laundered" narcodollars stay in America? Maybe, there's another agenda being served.

FUMIGATION AND THE GENTICALLY MODIFIED FUTURE

The Clinton administration also insists that any peace agreement must permit crop destruction measures and other U.S. counternarcotics operations in Colombia. The same is true of the chemical and biological weapons that Washington employs. These measures multiply the dangers to the civilian population, the environment, and legal agriculture. They destroy legal food crops like yucca and bananas, water sources, pastures, livestock and all the crops included in coca crop substitution programs. There are also uncertain but potentially severe effects on the fragile tropical rainforest environment, which contains significant parts of the planet's biodiversity.

The genetically modified mycoherbicide used to destroy coca plantations - part developed at the Long Ashton Research Institute in Bristol - will financially benefit the corporations that will mass-produce it for the Plan. The same will be said for the parasitic multinationals that will move in to "develop" the areas devastated by the ecocide. At the end of the day, the Fat Cats get fatter, while the population starves.

Since the fumigation of coca crops began a couple of years ago, cocaine production has rocketed, alongside the rapid increase in massacres (which is almost doubling year on year).

SIMILAR SITUATION THROUGHOUT THE REGION

Much the same is true throughout the Andean region. For instance, there is a similar situation developing in Bolivia, with "Plan Dignidad". This is being met by widespread resistance. Additionally, anti drug spraying programs are developing in Thailand and Afghanistan. The whole of Latin America is under threat as the United States' global police force readies itself for war.

GENERAL SITUATION IN COLOMBIA

Through the 1990s, Colombia has been the leading recipient of U.S. military aid in Latin America, and has also compiled the worst human rights record. In Colombia, however, the military armed and trained by the United States has not crushed domestic resistance, though it continues to produce its regular annual toll of atrocities. Each year, some 300,000 new refugees are driven from their homes, with a death toll of about 3,000 and many horrible massacres. The great majority of atrocities are attributed to the paramilitary forces. a UN study reported that the Colombian security forces that are to be greatly strengthened by the Colombia Plan maintain an intimate relationship with death-squads, organise paramilitary forces, and either participate in their massacres directly or, by failing to take action. The rate of killings had increased by almost 20 percent over the preceding year, and that the proportion attributable to the paramilitaries had risen from 46 percent in 1995 to almost 80 percent in 1998, continuing through 1999. 68 percent increase in massacres in the first half of 1999 as compared to the same period of 1998, reaching more than one a day, overwhelmingly attributed to paramilitaries.

Prominent human rights activists continue to flee abroad under death threats. several trade unionists are murdered every week, mostly by paramilitaries supported by the government security forces. Forced displacement in 1998 was 20 percent above 1997, and increased in 1999. Colombia now has the largest displaced population in the world.

Hailed as a leading democracy by Clinton and other U.S. leaders and political commentators, Colombia did at last permit an independent party to challenge the elite system of power-sharing. The fact that about 3,000 activists from this party were assassinated shows the outrageousness of these claims. Meanwhile, shameful socio-economic conditions persist, leaving much of the population in misery in a rich country with concentration of wealth and land-ownership that is high even by Latin American standards. The situation became worse in the 1990s as a result of the neoliberal reforms". Approximately 55 percent of Colombia's population lives below the poverty level.

Ten years ago, as U.S.-backed state terror was increasing sharply, the Minister of Defense called for "total war in the political, economic, and social arenas," while another high military official explained that guerrillas were of secondary importance: "the real danger" is "what the insurgents have called the political and psychological are," the war "to control the popular elements" and "to manipulate the masses." The "subversives" hope to influence unions, universities, media, and so on.

POLITICS OF DRUGS IN COLOMBIA

The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) reports that "all branches of government" in Colombia are involved in "drug-related corruption." Other observers have also reported the heavy involvement of the military in narcotrafficking, and the U.S. military has also been drawn in. The paramilitaries openly proclaim their reliance on the drug business. However, the U.S. and Latin American press report, "the US-financed attack stays clear of the areas controlled by paramilitary forces," though "the leader of the paramilitaries [Carlos Castano] acknowledged last week in a television interview that the drug trade provided 70 percent of the group's funding."

In standard U.S. terminology, the FARC forces are "narco-guerrillas," a useful concept as a cover for counterinsurgency, but one that has been sharply criticised on factual grounds. It is agreed-and FARC leaders say-that they rely for funding on coca production, which they tax, as they tax other businesses. But "'The guerrillas are something different from the traffickers,' says Klaus Nyholm, who runs the UN Drug Control Program," which has agents throughout the drug producing regions. He describes the local FARC fronts as "quite autonomous." In some areas "they are not involved at all" in coca production and in others "they actively tell the farmers not to grow [coca]."

WHY DRUGS IN COLOMBIA?

Why do peasants in Colombia grow cocaine, not other crops? The reasons are well known. Peasants grow coca because of the crisis in the agricultural sector of Latin American countries, escalated by the general economic crisis in the region. There are other factors that operate to increase coca production. Colombia was once a major wheat producer. However, due to developments in free trade and the globalised economy, wheat production has been undermined. A year before President Bush announced the "drug war" with great fanfare (once again), the international coffee agreement was suspended under U.S. pressure, on grounds of "fair trade violations." The result was a fall of prices of more than 40 percent within two months for Colombia's leading legal export.

GLOBAL POLITICS OF DRUGS

In the 1960s, many third world governments (acting through UNCTAD-United Nations Commission on Trade and Development) proposed a "new international economic order" in which the needs of the large majority of people of the world would be a prominent concern. One proposal was a program for stabilising commodity prices for third world products (e.g. coffee, sugar, bananas etc)- a practice that is standard within the industrial countries by means of one or another form of subsidy. However, this was successfully resisted by agribusiness and now free trade has ensured that those with market power in the food chain (from energy corporations to retailers) are enjoying great profits while the agricultural crisis, which is real, is concentrated in the middle of the chain, among smaller farmers, who produce the food farmers are therefore compelled to turn to crops for which there is a stable market. The result is that drug entrepreneurs can easily find farmers eager to grow coca, cannabis or opium for which there is always a ready market in the rich societies. Furthermore, IMF-World Bank programs demand that countries open their borders to a flood of (heavily subsidised) agricultural products from the rich countries, with the obvious effect of undermining local production. Those displaced are either driven to urban slums (thus lowering wage rates for foreign investors) or instructed to become "rational peasants," producing for the export market and seeking the highest prices-which translates as "coca, cannabis, opium." Having learned their lessons properly, they are rewarded by attack by military gunships while their fields are destroyed by chemical and biological warfare, courtesy of Washington and European governments.

DRUGS, TOBACCO, AND HYPOCRISY

The US Supreme Court recently concluded that it has been "amply demonstrated" that tobacco use is "perhaps the single most significant threat to public health in the United States," responsible for more than 400,000 deaths a year, more than AIDS, car accidents, alcohol, homicides, illegal drugs, suicides, and fires combined." As use of this lethal substance has declined in the U.S. companies have shifted to markets abroad, such as Colombia. In comparison to the 400,000 deaths caused by tobacco every year in the United States, "drug"-related deaths reached a record 16,000 in 1997. Tobacco products are not only forced on countries, but also advertising for them, under threat of trade sanctions. The Colombian cartels, in contrast, are not permitted to run huge advertising campaigns in which a Joe Camel - counterpart extols the wonders of cocaine.

DRUGS AND POVERTY AT HOME

Furthermore, only 4 out of 10 "drug" addicts who needed treatment received it, according to a White House report. The seriousness of concern over use of drugs was illustrated when a House Committee was considering the Clinton Colombia Plan. It rejected an amendment calling for funding of drug demand reduction services. It is well known that these are far more effective than forceful measures. But the inexpensive and effective path will not be followed. Rather, the drug war targets alike poor peasants in southern countries and poor people in northern countries. While Clinton's Colombia Plan was being formulated, senior administration officials discussed a proposal by the Office of Budget and Management to take \$100 million from the \$1.3 billion then planned for Colombia, to be used for treatment of U.S. addicts. There was near-unanimous opposition, particularly from the US "drug czar". Since 1980 "the war on drugs" has shifted to punishing offenders, border surveillance, and fighting production at the source countries. One consequence, both in Europe and North America, is the enormous increase in drug-related (often victimless) crimes and an explosion in the prison population, with no detectable effect on availability or price of drugs.

CALL FROM THE PROCESS OF BLACK COMMUNITIES

The war in Columbia, killing and displacement of the black population

Columbia is a country of 37 million inhabitants, of which 30% (that is to say 9,210,000) are black people descended from slaves. Through a process of struggle and resistance lasting more than 3 centuries we have achieved our liberty, fleeing towards mountains, valleys and coasts which the European conquerors had not yet reached. During the process of adaptation and survival in an unknown world, which has lasted hundreds of years, the free blacks were able to create their own world and culture.

After this period of liberation, exclusion and racism are what have marked the relation of Colombians towards the black population. The draining of resources from our territories by large multinationals, the alienation of our culture, the oppressing conditions of absolute poverty and the denial of all social, economic, political and cultural rights are just some of the ways that this exclusion expresses itself.

Today, in the internal war which Columbia has been going through for several decades, black people have been condemned to a silent extermination. This has been imposed by the state and economic groups, at the same time as the population are denied of their individual and collective rights. This situation has evolved from the uprooting, enchaining, exporting and selling of black people like animals in America, so as to consolidate the conquests which made the northern countries powerful. At the beginning of this new millennium the black people of Colombia are facing ETHNOCIDE; this is being perpetuated by the different actors in the war.

The areas where violent expulsion of the population is occurring correspond to the strategic zones of the war. A million black people have been displaced from their lands (up till 1st October 2000), which are being occupied by outsiders who accept the authority of the armed groups and the state and are apostles of an economic and political model based in exclusion and which generates destruction and death for the bearers of cultures which are thousands of years old.

The historic project of the black people has its cultural, territorial, environmental and social basis. Its struggle consists in the defense of these areas in which we have lived since ancestral times; created and recreated our culture throughout our history in Colombia and America. We, Black people are demanding the government gives collective community titles; we are struggling for the strengthening of our identity and autonomy which demands the ability to freely decide our own ways of life in accordance with our aspirations and our identity as a people. The capitalist State of Colombia has turned the organised black communities - who are struggling for the defense of territory as a way of life and their cultural principles such as identity - into victims of racism, poverty, marginalisation and military targets of armed groups who defend the interest of politicians, large land owners, drug traffickers and businessmen. These look for the irrational exploitation of mineral resources, the destruction of biodiversity, the implementation of tourist projects, ports, canals, agroindustrial projects, industrial logging, energy infrastructure....

After slavery, displacement is the most criminal aggression against the black population of Columbia and America. Displacement is a result of intimidation and massacres; it results in invisibility; the loss of territories, the loss of access to natural resources, the tearing apart of families, solidarity, self esteem, and the right to live in peace in accordance with our traditions, customs and cultural aspirations.

We demand the different actors in the war in Columbia to stop the armed conflict, respect their autonomy, their fundamental rights and not to fight in their territories. We call on the international community to accompany us, to show solidarity and to struggle with us to consolidate, in this capitalist world; the territories of the black population in accordance with the teaching of their ancestors: the territory is the space where you can be and remain; where your ideals and your own history remains, where life, happiness hope and freedom will reign.

Process of Black Communities, Prague, September 26th 2000 - PCNKolombia@hotmail.com

The armed conflict in Colombia has lead to an apparent polarisation between guerrilla and State - as the only two actors in the conflict, leaving several other sectors of society and social struggles invisible.

The black communities' ancestors have taught them a saying " I am because we are" (soy porque somos) meaning that

an individual can only be free if the people around are free too. This was a fundamental principle in the struggle against slavery which built their movements. Now in this age of globalised capitalism they said their struggle for freedom can only be successful if other struggles for freedom succeed to. They would like to develop new forms of International solidarity based on that principle.

We propose to start in Geneva a process of discussion on how to give shape to the campaign against Plan Colombia in Europe, on the basis of the proposals that come from the Colombian movements (black, indigenous and peasant). An important element of these proposals is a speakers tour of Colombians in Europe, that the PCN has proposed to hold from the 19th of January till the end of February (in order to also participate in the anti-WEF actions). There will be 6 representatives of black communities travelling around Europe in groups of 2 (one man and one woman) and hopefully there will be some representatives of indigenous and peasant movements with them (but this is not confirmed yet). We would like to start discussing these tours and the other proposals of the Colombians in Geneva. We hope that the groups working on the mobilisation against the WEF will consider making Colombia an important issue in the protests. Alfonso will arrive to Europe before the meeting in Geneva: on Wednesday the 13th he will participate in an event at the European Parliament in Strasbourg, together with two other Colombians: an adviser of the National Peasant Council, and an indigenous person who has just been elected governor of Cauca for the first time in colombian history (one of the most violent and colonial regions of Colombia, in the North of the Pacific coast; he was the candidate of a coalition of indigenous, black, peasant and other social movements). On the evening of the same day he will speak at the KTS of Freiburg, most possibly also with the other two persons from Colombia (this is still to be confirmed). If you want to attend that meeting, get in touch with desaparecido@gmx.de

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