

# Colombia

Action on



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Gustavo Petro begins his term as President in Bolívar Square in Bogotá. At his side is Bolívar's sword.

## Petro puts his Trust in Life

By Father Alejandro Angulo S.J., ex-Director and Investigator of CINEP  
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This article has been translated from Spanish to English by Eunice Gibson, CSN Volunteer Translator.

### 1. The Drug Trafficking Challenge

The new administration in Colombia will have to give priority to the old problem of drug trafficking. But to make any progress, we have to understand its importance in the development of Colombian society, and its abundant roots in the development of the world economy.

Drug trafficking has the power of a multinational company, for its mobility and for its capacity to use the force required to avoid its destruction. It's a multinational and transnational business that no government has been able to control, because it not only has the same power as that exercised over national governments by the multinational business world, but it also enjoys greater opportunities than the multinationals that the law recognizes, thanks to the fact that it also performs in secret. That breadth of its playing field is a first obstacle for any kind of outside control, because it would require multinational control, which does not yet seem to be feasible.

# Petro puts his Trust in Life cont.

Besides that, drug trafficking includes the death penalty among its organizing principles, which makes it possible to use terror as an element of coercion, thus achieving maximum efficiency in its method of operation. The government can't resort to terror against the terror, and this is one of the reasons it's at a disadvantage in the so-called war on drugs. The armed terror of the mafias has a capacity for persuasion that is unparalleled by other methods. This lack of clarity in the efforts to control drug trafficking by means of military action is demonstrated in Colombia by the notable failure of its so-called anti-drug policy. The Colombian Army is appointed to defend the population, not to control illegal trade.

The capacity to employ millions in bribes gives drug trafficking another advantage over government controls, and in a society with a proclivity to corruption, like Colombia's, it has been shown to be very effective. The most recent political campaign had fighting corruption as its basic argument, but the reality is that the phenomenon has a very long history, from which we can conclude that it presents an enormous challenge to any administration.

## 2. Security and Culture

One of the promises of the Petro campaign was to ensure the security of the population. The meaning of the word security at this moment in the history of Colombia is much more complicated than it would appear at first glance, because of the reasons

explained above, and because, besides the impactful difficulty of controlling the drug traffic, we have to add what's referred to as common crime. That kind of crime competes with and collaborates with drug crime. It competes as a private business of small urban and rural groups; but it also collaborates occasionally when that provides an opportunity to achieve common objectives.

Counteracting that kind of insecurity is one of the tasks of the police, but in order to be effective, the police need the help of society. Petro has proposed that kind of collaboration of the population with the police, using the doubtful hypothesis that Colombians have civic spirit and a clear idea of the common good. The evidences that the population of Colombia needs a feeling of public spirit, and can learn to respect the public good, are ascertainable for anyone who travels around the country and pays attention to an enormous and profound logic of individualism at every level. That has favored drug trafficking. The drug trafficking mentality fits perfectly with the individualistic attitude of the so-called Colombian culture, and so explains the flowering of the business and its rapid expansion.

## 3. One for all and all for one

In spite of the complexity of the challenge, the goal that Petro has set is not impossible. More still, its very multi-faceted nature makes it possible to approach it from different sides with a varied strategy. One principal line is

the education of young people as well as adults, about which Petro has mentioned some aspects. As the problem is in the first place one of public health, it's a task for the teachers and social workers, in collaboration with the health system, to design the way to solve it.

The economic dimension of the problem is also decisive, and Petro, with his idea about agrarian reform, seemed to understand clearly that he has to consider the reality of the campesino world, and make an effort to remedy their lamentable social and economic situation. His proposal for that, to open a school in every municipality of Colombia, shows a good understanding, because it touches a nerve of the drug trafficking problem: the lack of education.

But perhaps Petro's greatest intuition is seen in his insistence that every effort to achieve development of Colombia must be based on the collaboration of all parties. This proposal is a blow to drug trafficking, which assumes and causes the fragmentation of societies that results from addiction to hallucinogenic drugs. Petro declares that we have to achieve and establish cooperation, not only as a pattern for the government, but also as a pattern for living. For a highly individualistic people, this proposal is hard to accept, as the opposition demonstrates. Nevertheless, joining forces is the only way to counteract the drug trafficking culture, and the groups of intelligent people in this country will have to support that line of cooperative action, which is the effective way to

Action On Colombia is the official newsletter of the Colombia Support Network, a national peace and justice network of groups and individuals working to promote respect for human rights in Colombia and a just relationship between the United States and Colombia through grass-roots activism.

CSN supports a nonviolent, negotiated resolution to the conflict in Colombia.

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exorcise the proverbial Colombian violence. Petro knows that, and his formula of putting his trust in life demonstrates that he has understood

the nature of that addiction to death that has continued digging common graves and leaving broad regions of the country in mourning. Putting his trust

in life could rid us of that hundred-year-old curse and offer Colombia a scenario of gracious and promising progress.

# All in on Petro

By Jack Norman

Whether the US likes it or not, Colombia's future is in Petro's hands for four years. Even with the inevitable stumbling and mistakes, he's shown through his coalition-building that he has the political skills to implement some of his important ideas. It would tie his hands if his political opponents see an ambivalent US. Pres. Biden should quickly invite Petro to the White House, welcome him with a nicely-photographed embrace, and publicly state his support and optimism for Petro's agenda.

## **Withhold aid from the military if it doesn't accept civilian authority.**

Are the generals and colonels willing to accept subservience to the elected President? If the US shows lukewarm support for Petro, the military will be emboldened against Petro. Showing all-out support for Petro will cover his backside. Without a military which answers to the President, there will be no progress toward a just and democratic Colombia.

## **Work with Petro to build an alternative to the War on Drugs.**

The US must strongly support these Petro initiatives regarding coca/cocaine:

Limit US extradition of Colombians who committed crimes in the US. It is a problem that the US extradites for drug crimes people wanted in Colombia for war crimes and human rights abuses. End for good US interest in aerial spraying as a technique for limiting coca production.

## **Accept Colombia's decriminalization of the coca trade.**

Don't fight Petro on it, publicly or privately. The US doesn't have to announce that it likes it, but it must negotiate seriously on how it will be implemented. The US must enact a cease-fire in the War on Drugs at least in Colombia.

## **Switch US foreign aid for Colombia's military into aid for rural and human development.**

It is doubtful the US Congress would approve additional Colombian aid, so the only way to bring more support for economic and social development is to take it from the military aid. Make clear to Colombia's military that all aid is contingent on their acknowledging primacy of the President.

## **Defeat DeSantis and Rubio in the November 2022 election.**

It will be politically difficult for Biden to provide Colombia the support it needs because of entrenched right-wing US politicians such as the Florida governor and senator. Defeating them is essential in order to dampen the political power of Colombian-Americans in Florida.

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*Action on Colombia*

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# PETRO: DRUG TRAFFICKING AND GLOBAL WARMING

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President Petro's speech to the United Nations was clear, direct, challenging, and appropriate, and did not fall into express accusations of responsibilities of the so-called developed countries for those two failures. The news magazine CAMBIO<sup>1</sup> has pointed out that a similar speech was read by President Barco Vargas several years ago, in the same setting, the United Nations General Assembly. He had cited the same difficulties that drug trafficking brings to our countries, and he had emphasized the enormous profits made by the companies that make the precursor chemicals for concentrating the cocaine, and the colossal income for the financial system<sup>2</sup> that derives profit from the business of drug trafficking.

That does identify the rosary of damages created by the traffic in narcotics that has its origin in a society that is capitalist, consumerist, hedonist, and devoid of feelings; feelings for the effects like the destruction of virgin forest in the Amazon jungles, the uncontrolled fumigation to increase Monsanto's earnings, the migration (forced displacement) that puts 2 million people on the southern border of the United States, the arrest and killing of dozens of the people that are fleeing the implementation of this "war" and of the neoliberal model that is destroying the lives of entire continents.

1 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XocSSg66Js8>

2 <http://www.forodeseuridad.com/artic-reflex/8164.htm>

Add to that rosary the imprisonment of 2 million black people criminalized by their role in the micro-traffic, some even to imprisonment for life, some in private prisons, businesses owned by friends of the politicians that legislate with the razor of racism. But it's strictly to the contrary for the owners of the chemical companies that sell the precursor chemicals, and the bankers that enjoy sufficient impunity to launder the millions of dollars from the traffic. Besides that, there is the death of 1 million inhabitants of this continent; the enormous majority are campesinos, Afro people, indigenous people, police and low-level soldiers that pay with their lives, the one because they have to have something to live on, and the others the "serfs" in armies that are at the service of those getting rich off this "industry."

He emphasized that this "offensive" that prioritizes benefits for big capital and death and repression for poorer people is intended to "entertain us" with a "war" on drugs while they are sacking the mining and energy resources, especially coal and petroleum which, by the way, are provoking global warming and have the planet on the verge of collapse.

## **The challenges: Global warming**

Building a "new" nation implies that the countries that in one way or another are intervening in Colombia will commit to saving the Amazon, which protects the planet from the collapse that would mean the loss of the world's lungs, and that they would cease the exploitation of coal, petroleum, and gas, moving

to a different, cleaner, more efficient and planet-friendly source of energy. They must reconfigure the war on trafficking of substances that can be used illegally, in order to permit the native people to continue using them in their traditional uses and medicines that don't concern anyone, thus respecting their ancestral customs.

## **The Peace**

As a nation, we face the challenge of constructing what Gustavo Petro Urrego calls total peace, a peace first negotiated with the armed actors and then with the economic powers that have been sustaining those forces in a framework of abuses in various regions of the planet, making the task more complicated.

He emphasizes the neutrality of this continent, the rejection of the war in Ukraine, but also the rejection of the invasions of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria, the first of which is still a challenge to human existence in the sense that the gods of war put the existence of the planet in danger and are launching its destruction.

It's the gods of war that have promoted the invasions of this continent that resulted in 75 million indigenous people killed, and 33 million Afro people first kidnapped and later killed in the orgy of slavery. Later the First World War in Europe cost 5 million victims, then the Second, which cost 55 million human beings, and later on the successive imperial invasions against non-white people. This has produced and continues to produce millions and millions of people killed.



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**There is no peace without justice**

The last phrase in this speech pulled on the heartstrings of those who from many nations are calling for a new and fairer world order, more respect for our Mother Earth, or as Pope Francis has said, for our common home. Building social justice in the framework of a capitalist system that destroys anyone who leaves the criminal

environment where he has been living, is an assignment not just for him as the President, not just for the citizens of Colombia, but also for every one of the human beings on this planet who idealizes a world at peace, a world that is just, and is careful of every one of its resources.

It's our challenge not only as Colombians, but as human beings, to work to build a new country, the

country that Cecilia Zarate-Laun dreamed of. I imagine she would be blissful at the triumph of a person who means hope for a people like ours. In spite of so much crime, assault, and abuse, we expect, and we will be building a better future day after day, with a smile on our lips, like that beautiful smile with which Cecilia always confronted life.



Gerardo Cajamarca, who worked with Gustavo Petro, and whom CSN helped bring to the U.S., visits with Norman Stockwell for an interview at WORT Radio in Madison in August 2004. Norman is now the Publisher of The Progressive Magazine.

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# Illicit Crop Substitution, Agroecology, and Gustavo's Path Forward in Colombia

By Veronica Limeberry  
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## Abstract:

In the historic peace agreement between the FARC and Colombian state, the state agreed to develop and implement a coca crop substitution program to assist coca growers in transitioning to non-illicit commodity crops (such as coffee). Not only has this program yet to support coca producers in their transitions, the US has continued to force a policy of massive aerial fumigation and community destruction to eradicate coca. Many rural smallholder farmers, Afro-Descendant communities, and Indigenous leaders argue that the failures of the substitution program highlight larger failures to integrate rural community leadership in their own development. Community-led agroecology has become a central debate in Colombia's post-coca, post-conflict future. With the incoming Petro Administration, Colombia is poised to take an alternative path that centers community-led development and wellbeing in regard to coca transitions. In this article I focus on leadership and responses from communities to argue that centering agrobiodiversity conservation through community-led initiatives in peacebuilding processes has potential to be an innovative core for environmental conflict resolution, along with the more progressive goals of community wellbeing. The US must change its coca eradication policy to fit

the needs and realities of communities on the ground in Colombia, supporting the progressive campaigns introduced by the incoming Petro Administration.

## Introduction

Newly elected Colombian President Gustavo Petro made his introduction on the world stage in a powerful speech to the UN on September 20, 2022. He began, *I come from one of the three most beautiful countries on Earth. There is an explosion of life there. Thousands of multicolored species in the seas, in the skies, in the lands. I come from the land of yellow butterflies and magic. There in the mountains and valleys of all greens, not only do the abundant waters flow down, but also the torrents of blood. I come from a land of bloody beauty. My country is not only beautiful, it is also violent.*

*How can beauty be conjugated with death, how can the biodiversity of life erupt with the dances of death and horror? Who is guilty of breaking the enchantment with terror? Who or what is responsible for drowning life in the routine decisions of wealth and interest? Who is leading us to destruction as a nation and as a people?...*

*The jungle that tries to save us, is at the same time, destroyed. To destroy the coca plant, they spray poisons, glyphosate in mass that runs through the waters, they arrest its growers and imprison them. For destroying or possessing the coca leaf, one million Latin Americans are killed and two million Afro-Americans are imprisoned in North America. Destroy the plant that kills, they shout from the North, but the plant is but one more of the millions that perish when they unleash the*

*fire on the jungle. ...*

*Coca and the peasants who grow it, because they have nothing else to grow, are demonized. You are only interested in my country to spray poisons on our jungles, to take our men to jail and put our women in exclusion. You are not interested in the education of the child, but in killing its jungle and extracting coal and oil from its entrails. The sponge that absorbs the poison is useless, they prefer to throw more poisons into the atmosphere.... It is better to declare war on the jungle, on its plants, on its people. While they let the forests burn, while hypocrites chase the plants with poisons to hide the disasters of their own society, they ask us for more and more coal, more and more oil, to calm the other addiction: that of consumption, of power, of money. (Dispatch 2022)*

His speech highlights his radical departure from Colombia's policies of the past—Plan Colombia, the War on Drugs, and centuries long partnership with US interests (Dion and Russler 2008; Elhawary 2008; Main 2022; Livingstone 2004; US Department of State 2022). While former conservative President Ivan Duque fought to maintain aerial glyphosate fumigation and forced coca eradication, supporting and receiving aid to do so from Trump (and later Biden) in the US, Petro has strongly signaled that his regime will emphasize social wellbeing and an end to destructive drug eradication policies. He points out the ills of rampant extractivism embedded in neoliberal capitalism, calling on countries of the world to address their addiction to



consumption and their hypocrisy in promoting “sustainability” even as they destroy rainforests and biodiversity. He highlights the War on Drugs as an attack against peasants who are caught in a system they did not create and are trying to survive through. Instead, he argues, the extreme individualism, loneliness, isolation, and endless consumption in this era are drivers of these plagues (both literal and metaphorical) and harms. The solutions are overcoming the addictions and structures of neoliberalism and building policies of community wellbeing for all.

This article examines coca substitution policy alternatives presented by communities who are trying to survive amidst the implementation of the peace deal, wherein post-conflict peacebuilding hinges partially on the transition of illicit coca crops. The Colombian government issued a voluntary transition program in 2017, Programa Nacional Integral de Sustitución de Cultivos de Uso Ilícito (PNIS; National Comprehensive Program for the Substitution of Illicit Crops in English), in which producers who report themselves to the government receive monetary payments to aid them in transition. Reports and analysis by the Colombian NGO Foundation for Ideas for Peace (FIP) highlights multiple concerns emerging from this program. Specifically, coca production did not decrease, rates of homicide in PNIS pilot regions have reached record levels, and the government does not have substitution crops currently in place for transition (Fundación Ideas para la Paz 2019). The strong partnership between the US and Colombia, especially between Trump and Duque, also continued enforcing mass glyphosate fumigation efforts, continuing to disrupt ecologies and communities.

However, with the leftist government of Gustavo Petro coming into leadership this late summer and fall of 2022, there are drastic changes being ushered into place for PNIS and the overall peacebuilding project. Given Colombia’s historical partnerships with the US, the current Biden administration must be up to the task of supporting Petro’s environmental- and-community focused restructuring of PNIS and ending the ‘war on drugs.’ Biden has claimed to want to support broad climate change alleviation initiatives, and by supporting Petro’s changes to PNIS, along with community-led agroecological interventions for coca crop substitution, this could be a powerful inroad to transforming US paradigms towards peacebuilding, illicit crops, and sustainability in Colombia and beyond.

### **Overview of Coca Cultivation and Eradication in Colombia**

In 1961 the United Nations ratified the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs. While the espoused goal of the Convention was for the “health and welfare of mankind,” ultimately it “forced ‘developing countries’ to abolish all non-medical and non-scientific uses of the three plants that had for centuries been embedded in social, cultural and religious traditions” (Sinha 2001). The Convention would go into effect in 1975, but in 1971, Richard Nixon declared a global ‘War on Drugs,’ leading to the creation of the United Nations Fund for Drug Abuse Control (UNFDAC) (ibid). The US led the effort to fund and strengthen the Single Convention, leading to increased Western support and strict global enforcement of the Single Convention’s attack on hemp, opium, and coca. As Sinha points out, colonial trade wars along with “prohibition-based drug

control,” defined much of the era of decolonization. Importantly, “the United States and the colonial powers were confronted with the effects of drug addiction and abuse at home, but rather than address both demand – the socio-medical nature of such problems – and supply, they focused uniquely on the latter and attempted to stem the flow of drugs into their territories” (ibid). This ultimately led to the burden of drug control falling on Latin American and Asian countries, just as the latter were gaining their independence.

Supply-side control programs (that focused on eradication of the plant) have dominated global policy and enforcement efforts, which disproportionately impacts countries where coca is grown. After the 1961 Single Convention, the first US-supported international crop eradication program took place in 1968 in Mexico. By the late 1970s the defining relationship between the US and Colombia had become counter-narcotics policy, with the US offering billions of dollars in coca eradication aid to Colombia. In 1999, the US Congress “passed the Western Hemisphere Drug Elimination Act authorizing \$2.3 billion for international counter-narcotics operations—including over \$246 million for eradication programs and equipment in Mexico, Colombia, Bolivia, and Peru—with the aim of reducing illegal drug flows by 80% by 2001” (Institute for Policy Studies 2005). In 2000, the U.S. passed Plan Colombia, a “\$1.3-billion counterdrug effort to operate mainly in Colombia. Plan Colombia is largely a military offensive, using the Colombian army and police as U.S. proxies not only against drug crops but also against insurgents” (ibid). These efforts have had little to no success in meeting their target reduction goals, and often result in increased tensions

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# Gustavo's Path Forward in Colombia cont.

both within and between coca-growing states.

In Colombia, eradication efforts have taken the form of aerial fumigation using the herbicide glyphosate. With US support, Colombian counter-narcotics officials sprayed 1,790,000 hectares of land (an area larger than the state of Connecticut) with the herbicide (in their milk) (ibid). The World Health Organization declared glyphosate as a potential carcinogen and dangerous for both humans and the environment in 2015, resulting in President Juan Manuel Santos banning glyphosate aerial fumigation in Colombia (Guyton et al. 2015; Veitch 2019). The WHO report labeled glyphosate as a 2A carcinogen, meaning that it is likely carcinogenic to humans; the report indicates that there is limited evidence of glyphosate's relationship to non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, prostate cancer, and pancreatic cancer but notes there is sufficient evidence that it is carcinogenic to animals (Guyton et al. 2015). In 2017 the state of California also examined the carcinogenic risk of glyphosate and now requires warnings on labels of any products containing the herbicide (Richmond 2018). In addition to its human health impacts, glyphosate seeps into soil and waterways, harming soil microorganisms, beneficial insects and worms, and marine animals. Furthermore, early research has indicated that farm animals (such as cattle) that are exposed to glyphosate exhibit cellular damage and excrete the herbicide (in their milk and etc) (ibid). Hence, glyphosate's impact on human communities and larger biodiverse ecosystems is substantial.

Despite this, in March of 2019—largely in response to US President Donald Trump's commentary about withdrawing funding to Colombia—

President Iván Duque asked the Constitutional Court of Colombia to review the ban and consider lifting it. Duque planned to return to aerial glyphosate fumigation, which would earn promised additional counter-narcotics funding from the US (Veitch 2019). The UN representative of Office of Drugs and Crime in Colombia strongly disagreed with this approach, arguing that rural development and the voluntary substitution program are key to successful coca reduction (ibid). Furthermore, research shows that 35% of growers re-plant coca after forced eradication, while only 0.6% replant after voluntary substitution (Asmann 2019; Gorder 2019). Growers, harvesters, and landless laborers in the countryside also dispute aerial fumigation, citing fears for their health and loss of other crops they use for subsistence and livelihoods.

## **Emergence of the Illicit Crop Substitution Program (PNIS)**

In a monumental peace effort, the Colombian government and the FARC-EP came to a conflict termination agreement on August 26, 2012 (not passed until 2016) under the following conditions: “1. comprehensive agrarian policy reform, 2. political participation, 3. conflict termination, 4. solution to the problem of illicit drugs, 5. victims' reparation, 6. implementation, verification, and popular countersignature of the final agreement reached by the parties” (Brisman, South, and White 2016). These conditions specifically linked the peace process with agricultural reform, specifically of illicit crops, in addition to expanding democratic involvement of those impacted by coca production.

However, the peace process almost broke down when voters declined

the offered peace deal in October 2016. A new peace deal was brokered and then ratified by the Colombian Congress in November 2016, beginning the contemporary end of conflict and peace process in Colombia (Valencia 2017). As of July 2017, “a team comprised of FARC members, national and local government officials, UN staff, and community representatives came together to implement” Colombia's Illicit Crop Substitution Program (PNIS) (Penaranda 2017). The substitution program centers voluntary eradication (unlike previous forced eradication measures) wherein coca cultivators voluntarily enter the program. According to the formal deal, the government argues that voluntary crop substitution as a mechanism for peace focuses on generating “material and immaterial conditions of well-being for populations affected by crops for illicit use, in particular for rural communities in poverty that are currently deriving their subsistence from those crops” (El Presidente De La República De Colombia, 2017).

The framing of PNIS as a policy for wellbeing of both ‘material’ and ‘immaterial’ conditions for those in rural poverty establishes important foundations that have emerged as central tensions in the implementation of the program. For example: who counts as those in rural poverty subsisting on illegal crops? Does this include landowners, landless laborers, and peasant farmer communities? Furthermore, what qualifies as wellbeing? The debates around aerial fumigation are fundamentally about wellbeing (for individual and community health, the environment, and biodiversity).

Fundación Ideas Para la Paz (FIP)



presents a clear overview of PNIS in their July 2022 report. Defined in Decree 896 in 2017, PNIS serves to “promote the voluntary substitution of crops for illicit use, through development of programs and projects to contribute to overcoming conditions of poverty and marginalization of peasant families that derive their subsistence from crops for illicit use” (Fundación Ideas para la Paz 2022). As of this report, 99,097 families were reported to be beneficiaries of the program, across 56 municipalities, and 45,761 hectares of coca have been voluntarily eradicated (ibid). PNIS operates through two primary components, the Plans for Immediate Action (PAI) and Comprehensive Municipal and Community Substitution and Alternative Development Plans (PISDA). PAI tend to emphasize urgent action often targeted at the individual level and PISDA emphasizes collective and structural changes. Such programs include emergency/urgent food aid for coca cultivators transitioning, and long-term environmental recovery and livelihood strategies.

In the first phase of PNIS, the original plan was for coca growers to receive a \$300/month stipend and technical support to begin substitution and in the second phase communities would receive up to 15 years of support to draft alternative development plans for their regions and locales (El Presidente De La República De Colombia, 2017). However, “coca cultivation surged in anticipation of the peace deal, from 96,000 hectares to 146,000 in 2016. Farmers planted more because they expected cash from the government to switch to something else” (The Economist 2018). By 2019, the government has already failed to

deliver on its promises, resulting in an air of distrust and concern among rural populations who have already spent decades under violence and repression (Garzón and Suárez 2018).

The PNIS substitution program also neglects the social, economic, and cultural history of coca workers in the region. For many rural citizens, the inability to own land has led them to work either (1) as low-wage laborers for large agribusiness industries in the countryside under conditions that include long and grueling hours or (2) as coca cultivators for the FARC where they enjoy relatively better pay, the possibility for community building, and an increase in political voice. However, rural development alternatives have been proposed during the peace dialogue forums that took place from August 2012–2013. For example, from nineteen civil society organizations that included over 4,000 participants, peasant groups recommended: *“that peasant communities, indigenous communities and afro-descendant communities manage their lands as collective, rather than private, properties. Peasants pointed to the Peasant Enterprise Zones (PEZ), as a model for what they would like this new administration of property to be. PEZ are an arrangement where the communities themselves are in charge of agricultural activities, commercialisation activities and environmental protection”* (Brisman, South, and White 2016)

However, a report by UNODC highlights several early failures in the program. According to the report, 99,097 families enrolled in voluntary substitution—89,796 families have yet to receive full payment (with 41,910 of those receiving no payment), and 84,953 of those enrolled families have not received the guaranteed

food security program benefits for enrolling (UNODC and Government of Colombia 2019). Furthermore, almost half of eradicated coca fields have already been replanted; finally, Insight Crime analysis and FIP have both found that violence against communities and “land defenders” in PNIS regions has greatly increased, with over 700 community leaders assassinated since PNIS’s inception (Puerta and Chaparro 2019; Kirby 2019). While President Duque pressed the Colombian Constitutional Court to permit glyphosate aerial fumigation again as a response to these failures, key representatives from the UN along with local leaders, Indigenous groups, and peasant farmers are calling for more equitable, just, and agroecological solutions (Alsema 2019; Behrend and Whitehead 2017; Bolaños 2016; Chavez-Miguel et al. 2022; Cramer and Wood 2017).

Furthermore, after the impacts of a global pandemic, rampant inflation, and breaks in supply chain due to both climate and political crises (increased hurricanes, droughts, war with Ukraine, and so on), FIP points out that “the conditions and assumptions under which PNIS began to operate have changed” (Fundación Ideas para la Paz 2022). The origin of PNIS was predicated on the undertaking of the Comprehensive Rural Reform section of the Peace Accords. The underlying assumptions were that the government, in partnership with coalitions and communities, would undertake serious territorial transformation to support investments in access to land, infrastructure, and public goods; without this larger context of comprehensive rural development, the implementation of PNIS is nearly impossible (ibid).

On February 24, 2020 President

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# Gustavo's Path Forward in Colombia cont.

Duque ended cooperation with the UN Office on Drugs and Crime on monitoring crop substitution programs as part of the Colombian-FARC Peace Accords (Alsema 2020). This effectively eradicated external monitoring along with transparency and accountability. However, the Colombian Constitutional Court issued a reminder four days later, on February 28, that the Office of the President must still uphold the PNIS and coca crop substitution as part of its responsibility under the Peace Accords (Alsema 2020b). The pressure of Colombia's relationship with the US and President Trump's offers of financial support increasingly moved Duque to return to aerial fumigation; in a meeting of Defense Ministers for each country in 2020, Carlos Holmes Trujillo promised that 130,000 hectares of coca would be forcibly eradicated by the end of 2020 (ibid). Yet the Court and local communities continued to organize against this.

Coca and its associated impacts on human and environmental ecosystems is key to the peacebuilding process in Colombia. While President Duque aggressively pursued a return to forced eradication via aerial glyphosate fumigation, the majority of policy analysts, Indigenous and Afro-Colombian leaders, and smallholder or peasant farmers vehemently oppose this strategy. The health and biodiversity impacts that this policy holds are enormous in terms of human illnesses, cancers, and deaths along with biodiversity loss, soil degradation, and water pollution; all while proving to be ineffective for coca crop eradication in the long term. Instead, campesino organizations and rural communities have undertaken alternative practices for potential solutions. Cultivators and policy think-tanks are increasingly aware of the need to integrate

sustainable, agroecological practices to combat multiple crises of climate change, deforestation, ecosystem degradation, and rural hunger and health. The future of the PNIS voluntary substitution project should center the serious needs of these rural communities, as well as build and integrate accountability structures to ensure government promises are followed through. Without these steps, and without support for sustainable human and environmental ecosystems, there is significant risk for a resurgence of Colombia's internal conflict.

The next section turns to an overview of the policy shift from Duque to Petro, along with administration changes from Trump to Biden in the US, and the potential for future pathways and partnerships to support Petro's promises of progressive transformation.

## **From Duque to Petro: Coca Substitution Policy and the US**

In the face of these failures and lack of implementation of the Peace Accords, along with increasing economic, health, and social crises, Gustavo Petro emerged as a unique and bold candidate that could potentially address Duque's shortcomings. Even though in June Colombia and the US celebrated 200 years of partnership (US Department of State 2022), Duque still left office with low approval ratings (Staff 2022). Polls during and after the recent elections illustrate that many Colombians perceived his policies, especially regarding the peacebuilding process, as failures (Forero Rueda 2022a; Álvarez 2022; Main 2022). Gustavo Petro is the country's first leftist President, with the nation's first Afro-Colombian Vice President, Francia Márquez. Previously, Ivan Duque upheld a vocal and strong partnership with President Donald Trump, who

supported Duque's emphasis on continuing aerial fumigation and forced eradication (Norman 2019; Beeton 2021; BBC News 2020). However, even after Trump's loss in the US, Duque continued to partner with Biden and US support for the War on Drugs in Colombia (Holland and Cobb 2022; House 2022).

Gustavo Petro is a former member of the guerrilla rebel group, M-19 or the 19th of April Movement (which has long since demobilized). Following the end of M-19 he served as the mayor of Bogotá, as well as both a legislator and senator (GustavoPetro.co 2022; TRT World 2022). In 2011 he founded the Humane Colombia political party, emphasizing policies to fight poverty, inequality, protect the environment, and increase citizen participation in government (ibid). As mayor of Bogotá he implemented policies such as drinking water access for all, preventative health care programs, increasing funding and support for early childhood education, fostering accessible public transportation for the poor, creating youth art centers, and pioneering mobile healthcare centers for those suffering from drug addiction; he also supported policies to conserve local wetlands, create plans for water conservation, and plant trees in the city. During his tenure infant mortality significantly dropped and over half a million people were lifted out of poverty (ibid). Despite his significant improvements for the lives of the poor and environmental conservation, conservative elites succeeded in temporarily removing Petro from mayoral office, and were also caught sending paramilitary spies to observe him, while also sending him death threats throughout his career (BBC News 2014).

Petro's Presidential platform

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emphasizes implementation of the 2016 Peace Accords through addressing inequality, poverty, land access, and ecological crisis. In his speech to the UN in September of 2022, he powerfully articulated

*Behind the addiction to cocaine and drugs, behind the addiction to oil and coal, there is the real addiction of this phase of human history: the addiction to irrational power, to profit and money. This is the enormous deadly machinery that can extinguish humanity.*

*I propose to you as president of one of the most beautiful countries on earth, and one of the most bloodied and violated, to end the war on drugs and allow our people to live in peace. I call on all of Latin America for this purpose. I summon the voice of Latin America to unite to defeat the irrational that martyrs our bodies. I call upon you to save the Amazon Rainforest integrally with the resources that can be allocated worldwide to life.*

*If you do not have the capacity to finance the fund for the revitalization of the forests, if it weighs more to allocate money to weapons than to life, then reduce the foreign debt to free our own budgetary spaces and with them, carry out the task of saving humanity and life on the planet. We can do it if you don't want to. Just exchange debt for life, for nature. I propose, and I call upon Latin America to do so, to dialogue in order to end the war. Do not pressure us to align ourselves in the fields of war. It is time for PEACE (Dispatch 2022)*

His focus has been ending the war on drugs, along with US and global corporate influence, while simultaneously empowering campesinos, women, LGBTQ+ peoples, and the poor in Colombia. Peace, in Petro's policy articulations, is brought about by integrating community and environmental wellbeing and ending neoliberal extractivism. Additionally, he

plans to restore relations with Venezuela and other leftist leaders in South America (GustavoPetro.co 2022).

Furthermore, a truth commission initiated to investigate the FARC-Colombia civil war, released a report in June 2022, heavily criticizing the US for its role in the conflict. Specifically, the report states that the "consequences of [the] concerted and largely US-driven approach" to the war resulted in a "hardening of the conflict" (NY Times 2022). Declassified CIA documents have recently unveiled the extent of the knowledge and support of mass killings the US had during this era; additionally, "security forces that Washington spent decades training and arming through Plan Colombia and other initiatives were involved in the attacks on protestors last year" which resulted in more than 40 civilian deaths (Echols 2022).

The combination of the findings of the truth commission, along with Petro's radically divergent policies, have led to early tensions with the US. Despite this, early reports argue that "Petro is trying hard to avoid drawing the ire of U.S. officials and politicians. Having seen how Washington has dealt with leftist upstarts like Bolivia's Evo Morales, the Colombian president has made efforts to assuage concerns about his politics by avoiding anti-U.S. rhetoric and appointing a raft of centrist officials" (Echols 2022). Specifically, such appointments as Finance Minister Jose Antonio Ocampo signal ongoing partnership with the US—such as potentially not renegotiating Colombia's Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the US (ibid). However, he remains adamant toward his 'total peace' plan that will end the war on drugs and re- envision eradication policy through a focus on upholding substitution policy and broader structural transformations

toward justice.

On the US side, Biden's call to congratulate Petro for his win in June of 2022 emphasized "the importance of mutual respect and partnership as the foundation of the US-Colombia relationship," focusing on areas of shared interest such as addressing climate change, health security, and implementation of the Peace Accords (House 2022). In July, Petro met with Biden's delegation, where he was accompanied by National Security Adviser to the US Jon Finer. After the meeting, Petro stated that "This is a positive meeting because it shows the interest that exists in the government of the United States in Latin America and in Colombia" (Griffin and Acosta 2022). Finer, on the other hand, stated that "there would always be areas of disagreement, as in any of the U.S.'s relationships" and that "The United States and the Biden administration is not supportive of decriminalization" (Ibid).

Despite these tensions, the National Security Council and State Department have claimed that the Biden administration does see some opportunities to work with Petro, especially regarding implementation of global climate change conventions and the 2016 Peace Accords (Griffin and Acosta 2022; Rodriguez 2022). However, especially in the state of Florida where over 250,000 Colombian-American voters reside, domestic political struggles will shape Biden's narrative of support toward Petro. Among these voters—mostly conservative—the reaction toward Petro's win has been predominantly negative and distrustful (ibid). Simultaneously, the esteemed Wilson Center in DC has invited former President Duque to become a fellow (Main 2022). These internal political leanings will impact the Biden



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# Gustavo's Path Forward in Colombia cont.

administration's perspective toward a partnership with Petro.

Benjamin Gedan, the former South America director on the National Security Council under Obama and current deputy director of the Wilson Center's Latin American program, has stated that "There are clearly elements of Petro's agenda that are in conflict with U.S. interests in Latin America. That's undeniable. Still, I think the areas of agreement are also substantial... I don't want to exaggerate how chummy the relationship can be but I think it's possible" (Rodriguez 2022).

As Petro leads the way on a new paradigm for action against illicit crops and narcotic cultivation, it will be imperative that the Biden administration bolster areas of support and partnership between the two nations. Plan Colombia and the ongoing War on Drugs have been resounding failures, perpetuating cycles of violence and ecological destruction (Lopez Zuelita 2022; Paz Cardona 2019; Pearson 2016). Inequality, poverty, loss of biodiversity, and mass death have accompanied these decades-long policies. Petro envisions a radically new way of fostering structural transformations for justice that have the potential to heal Colombia's wounds and support ecological wellbeing. If the Biden administration is serious about supporting the implementation of the Peace Accords and fostering global support for climate change mitigation and adaptation, it must follow Petro's lead in Colombia.

The next section delves into the ways in which Petro's call for ending forced eradication and upholding the Comprehensive Rural Reform elements of the Peace Accords can be bolstered by integrating rural peoples' calls for structural changes and agroecological futures. The integration of these voices

and practices serve to strengthen Petro's commitment to changing the War on Drugs, implementing PNIS, and protecting the environment.

## **Coca, Agrobiodiversity, and Agroecology in Colombia**

In his speech to the UN, Petro proclaimed: *For the world's power relations, the jungle and its inhabitants are to blame for the plague that plagues them. The power relations are plagued by the addiction to money... to oil, to cocaine and to the hardest drugs to be able to anesthetize themselves more. Nothing is more hypocritical than the discourse to save the rainforest. The jungle is burning, gentlemen, while you make war and play with it. The rainforest, the climatic pillar of the world, disappears with all its life. The great sponge that absorbs planetary CO2 evaporates. The savior forest is seen in my country as the enemy to be defeated, as the weed to be extinguished.* (Dispatch 2022)

Here he highlights the hypocrisy and tension between environmental conservation, climate change policies, and the war on drugs. As he implies, (agro)biodiversity, especially in an era of increasing climatic change, species devastation, food insecurity, and resource-based conflicts, can potentially be an important rallying point in peacebuilding processes across the globe. Agrobiodiversity encompasses livelihoods, food security, community wellbeing, and environmental impacts. In complicated cases of illicit crops, agrobiodiversity—through agroecological cultivation and protection— is a critical juncture of how communities can move beyond the drug trade and foster democratic dialogues for their own development. Indigenous, smallholder farmer, and frontline-impacted community leadership is key in analyzing and addressing agrobiodiversity-centered peacebuilding

initiatives and creating sustainable conflict resolution---and in fact, community and cultural regeneration.

To frame the discussion around the policies in place and the goals of different communities, I examine agrobiodiversity governance emerging from both the state and coca growers/workers (primarily Indigenous and peasant communities). Agrobiodiversity governance—the existing policies, laws, treaties, agreements, and regimes that protect and conserve agrobiodiversity for both environmental and human benefit— is a critical component of many resource-based peacebuilding and livelihood efforts (Andersen 2008; Coolsaet 2015). Agroecology, as defined by Boletín Agrario, includes the "design, development and management of sustainable agroecosystems based on the application of ecological principles and the consideration of existing social, cultural and economic factors in agricultural communities" (boletinagrario.com 2022). Thus, agroecology is a social-scientific method incorporating ecological and community wellbeing to preserve agrobiodiversity.

Autonomy over seed usage, produced and wild foraged plant varieties, animal husbandry, and associated control over dietary consumption (i.e. food sovereignty) directly connects collective identities of peoples to practices of place (Shattuck, Schiavoni, and VanGelder 2018; Snipstal 2015). Threats from agro-industry, extractivist land use, and even top-down conservation efforts threaten to violently destroy agrobiodiverse species and practices, along with the peoples that protect them. As Nazarea highlights "local knowledge and cultural memory

are crucial for the conservation of biodiversity because both serve as repositories of alternative choices that keep cultural and biological diversity flourishing” (Nazarea 2006). Territory and identity intersect in the knowledge, growth, practices, preparation, and consumption of food. Threats to land and embedded agrarian practices also threaten the identity and survival of territorial groups themselves.

As Zimmerer et al. emphasize, today’s peasant and Indigenous territorial movements in Latin America are often predicated on histories of agrarian land use and protected biodiversity; they state, “agrobiodiversity-based food growing and use are integral to these movements along with their political claims and initiatives for sustainability, justice, and human health and well-being” (Zimmerer et al. 2017). Furthermore, as Clavijo et al. argue “production systems typical of a particular territory, form part of local economic systems and know-how of the rural population, largely determine the culture of the inhabitants of these spaces and their identity” (Clavijo, Combariza, and Baron 2011). Understanding agrobiodiversity governance and its linkages with practices of place and identity are crucial to analyzing Indigenous and campesino calls for agroecological solutions.

In their analysis of PNIS substitution and rural development, Vélez-Torres and Lugo-Vivas point to this key incident:

...One of the few occasions on which UN officials and public officials from the Territorial Renovation Agency (ART, from the Spanish initials) went into the hills to hold a meeting with cocaleros. The officials began by celebrating government efforts to comply with the peace agreement

and then explained the advantages of growing products under international legal rules. Then, the cocaleros were invited to decide between one of four agricultural projects: coffee, sacha-inchi (a type of peanut), hass avocado and cacao. Many coca growers had never heard of sacha-inchi before, and none of them were familiar with the cultivation of avocado. Although they certainly knew about coffee, a distrust among peasants persists towards the National Federation of Coffee Growers, owing to previous disputes. After two hours at the meeting, one indigenous leader indignantly commented to his colleagues: We are going to lose our traditional seeds and we won’t be able to reproduce them from [the crops] they will bring to us. And then, after they leave, we will have to buy seeds and will end up trapped in their technological packages. (Vélez-Torres and Lugo-Vivas 2021).

In sum, the substitution portion of PNIS was not community-led or even based in local ecologies; former cocaleros had the option of few crops, many of which they had no experience growing. Additionally, these few crops would be meant as monocultures, using modern commercial agricultural methods, relying on heavy chemical inputs for commodity-level yields. Community leaders expressed their concern with losing traditional seed varieties, biodiversity, and crops they had long known how to cultivate. Importantly, this system entraps campesinos and smallholder farmers in a structure of dependency on corporate agricultural conglomerates, global markets, wage labor, and increasing chemical inputs. As Raj Patel, Vélez-Torres and Lugo-Vivas, and many others have long pointed out, this system—based from the era of the Green Revolution—has deeply

harmed Indigenous and campesino communities globally, often leading to the loss of land, livelihood, and biodiversity (Patel 2013; Kumbamu 2020; Vélez-Torres and Lugo-Vivas 2021; McKeon 2015; McMichael 2009; Graddy-Lovelace 2017). Vélez-Torres and Lugo-Vivas sum up these concerns, stating that “If, in the process of voluntarily substituting alternatives for illicit crops, indigenous, African-descended and mestizo peasants find themselves excluded from productive autonomy and diversification, corporate agriculture could force them into even greater dependence on highly precarious wage labor off the farm, as well as on the import of capital intensive supplies” (Vélez-Torres and Lugo-Vivas 2021).

Prior to the signing of the Peace Accords in 2016, rural areas were particularly impacted by extreme violence. The state and paramilitaries did not only target the FARC, but also “all agrarian social movements” that attempted to form movements to protect their lands, crops, and rights (Sankey 2022). Sankey highlights that “it was campesinos in these territories that bore the brunt of paramilitary violence,” wherein between 1980–2012, paramilitary groups were directly responsible for 1,166 massacres and 8,903 assassinations (ibid). As Sankey goes on to emphasize, “six out of 10 paramilitary victims were peasants, and during the conflict, a total of 4.7 million people were displaced from 8.3 million hectares of land” (ibid). While agrarian movements were all but eradicated, a series of complex events and neoliberal market shifts led to a wide-scale agrarian strike that emerged in the summer of 2013.

Multiple agrarian unions and

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# Gustavo's Path Forward in Colombia cont.

coalitions, including Dignidades Agrarias, National Agricultural and Popular Roundtable (MIA), National Agrarian Coordinator (CNA), and others united under a banner of 'food sovereignty'; as Sankey notes, "These groups were concerned with a wide range of issues, including not only state protections for domestic agriculture but also land redistribution, extractivism, rural wages, and the impact of the war on drugs in marginal frontier regions. For the first time since the 1960s, various sectors of Colombian campesinos were not only able to combine forces to mobilize at the national level but also bring the state to negotiate around neoliberal policies and their effects in the countryside" (Sankey 2022). Over 1,000 protests occurred across the country, in addition to a national strike, beginning with over 150,000 coffee farmers in February of 2013 (Acevedo Osorio and Jimenez Reinales 2020).

While the agrarian strike did not accomplish its primary goals, it did bring discourse regarding agricultural, land, and food systems back into the realms of national visibility and movement organizing (Sankey 2022; Acevedo Osorio and Jimenez Reinales 2020). In a compilation of local agroecology initiatives across Colombia, editors Osorio and Reinales highlight that these agrarian mobilizations, and additional movements by National Federation of Agrarian Unions (Fensuagro), the Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca (CRIC), the Integration Committee of the Colombian Massif (CIMA), the Agrarian Summit, the Coordinator of Cultivators of Coca, Poppy and Marijuana (Coccam), the Process of Black Communities (PCN) along with others, have increasingly organized to protect their foodways, genetic heritage

(of seeds, wild flora, crops, etc), and lands (Acevedo Osorio and Jimenez Reinales 2020). Furthermore, many organizations have directly connected the lack of rural reform and the failure of implementation of the Peace Accords to continued state repression, loss of livelihoods, and ecological destruction in their communities (ibid).

Osorio and Reinales state that on top of the violence of the civil war,

*Drug trafficking dismantled many communities along with their production practices. As a country considered by experts as one of the historical centers of plant domestication, it has been affected by much violence throughout its history. From the destruction of crops and the demonization of many of them during the Spanish conquest as a tool of war and population control, as well as through the implementation of the technological model of the 'green revolution', spaces have been continually opened for the imposition of plant varieties developed by transnational corporations, thus eliminating peasant farming, ecosystems, and genetic heritage* (ibid).

In response to these harms, Osorio and Reinales find that impacted peasant, Indigenous, and Afro-Colombian communities have often turned to the use of agroecology to reclaim cultural practices, preserve seeds and agrobiodiversity, as well as protect their ancestral foods and lands. They state "critical problems that Colombian society must solve include reconstruction of the rural-to recovery of the roots of communities, of food conditions in the country, and preservation of environmental heritage" (ibid). Across Colombia, but especially in coca-growing regions, Indigenous territories, and Afro-Colombian lands, organizations and communities are "strengthening their community roots and protection of their territories, built

on the common denominator of agroecology" (ibid). Importantly, these scholars argue that the sociopolitical environment following the signing of the Peace Accords is a key moment to strengthen and uplift rural Colombia; a historical shift that has the potential to usher in transformative change that will lead to lasting peace (ibid).

## **PNIS, Agroecology, and Campesino Demands**

From the rise of rural movements and increasing emphasis on food sovereignty and agroecology, campesinos are demanding updates and changes to PNIS as it exists. In their most recent report on PNIS and its potential for upholding promises of the Peace Accords, FIP notes that the "individual focus of PNIS limits its ability to positively influence economic and social inclusion. The fact that the attention of the Program is focused on families—and not on a local collective process—has generated expectations toward where resources will be directed" (Fundación Ideas para la Paz 2022). In other words, emphasis on individual families rather than the larger context of community and environment has led to such issues as scattered and uncoordinated lists of resources and beneficiaries, creating a problem of "resources invested in a dispersed manner, with little impact in terms of territorial transformation" (ibid). Not only this, but collective agreements that were originally reached have been eschewed in favor of individual families; FIP notes that during the administration of President Santos, the Government signed 106 collective agreements in 98 municipalities, involving 188,036 families. Of these municipalities, the PNIS has been implemented in 47 with individually linked families.



That means that more than 90,000 families did not reach the individual support stage. The administration of the outgoing president [Duque] decided not to continue with the links, arguing that these agreements —considered as socialization documents— are instrumental agreements that do not generate legal obligations, and pointing out budget limitations to expand the number of PNIS beneficiaries. With the change of president, it is possible that the families that signed Collective Agreements and that are still waiting to join the PNIS will gain strength (ibid)

Furthermore, PNIS has been designed as a one-size-fits-all solution, rather than a process that is embedded in local culture, production, and ecologies. This ensures that some communities (those that align with PNIS assumptions about production) will find some forms of success with the program, while others will fail. Additionally, Special Management Zones (ZME), such as Forest Reserve Zones (where 36% of current beneficiaries reside) must be reimagined in terms of local land tenure and rights. Currently, beneficiaries are allowed to use the land, but have no long term promises or protections in terms of remaining on this land to fully implement substitution (ibid).

Tascón Recio has been appointed by Petro as his Drug Policy Czar; he is an economist and expert on drug prevention—especially regarding the use of coca. His strategy toward implementing PNIS has been to directly involve campesino, Indigenous, and Afro-Colombian leadership; the first two weeks of his appointment he spent visiting Cauca, Valle, Nariño, Guaviare and Catatumbo to meet with a diversity of community leaders and producers ((Forero Rueda 2022b). His key recommendations at this point

include decriminalization of campesinos, stating “What do the coca-growing peasant families do? They risk an illicit economy in exchange for guaranteeing a secure income for their survival. If we find alternatives to provide them with that survival income, that will be much more effective than the judicial and police policies that have been used in the last 50 years. The criterion will be to turn to the peasant economy” (ibid).

He argues that rather than just crop substitution, the entire process needs to offer substitution, including available jobs and guaranteed markets and prices. He goes on to state that “Saying that all the coca has to be uprooted in order to move forward is not true... We have to find an alternative that responds to all the coca-growing peasant families, not just those who signed up to the Santos government” (ibid). He maintains that this process must be realistically gradual, to truly create structural changes and transform the peasant economy.

Meanwhile, written by a coalition of 61 campesino organizations themselves, The Declaración Campesina/The Declaration Of The National Peasant Agenda Of Colombia, “proposes a political, economic, and legislative package for the new government which includes the creation of an agrarian jurisdiction, the elimination of contracts for exploration and exploitation of mining and energy resources in strategic ecosystems, the design of a comprehensive public policy on food sovereignty, and the enforcement of previous legislations that protect campesino rights. But above all, the Declaración demands the meaningful political participation of campesinos in all stages of policymaking” (Levine-Drizin and Martinez-Osorio 2022). Missing from Recio’s narrative is discourse of food sovereignty, exploitation, extractivism,

and ecosystems; the Declaración Campesina, released on July 14 2022, emphasizes

- campesino participation and leadership in public policy,
- intercultural rural jurisdiction that respects cultural histories and norms,
- a permanent body of the Colombian state to protect campesino rights,
- reforms to government policy to protect food sovereignty and peasant agricultural autonomy,
- increased rural infrastructure and development,
- an end to extractivism and exploitation of land and environment—protection of Colombia’s ‘territories of life’,
- and Colombia’s commitment to the Escazú Agreement—guaranteeing protections for the environment along with human rights

(El Espectador and Colombia +20 2022; Comisión Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz 2022).

Petro sees these demands as an opportunity to ‘democratize’ land use through sustainable agricultural production, reclamation of food sovereignty not only for campesinos but Colombia at large, and ending Colombia’s dependence on food imports (Levine-Drizin and Martinez-Osorio 2022). Thus, PNIS provides a starting point and stepping stone to not only end forced eradication through such harmful means as aerial glyphosate spraying, but to open up sociopolitical space in Colombia for structural transformation. The Declaration Of The National Peasant Agenda Of Colombia, along with current analysis of the state of PNIS from FIP, offers the Petro government

# Gustavo's Path Forward in Colombia cont.

potential pathways to create just Comprehensive Rural Reform, thus meeting the guarantees of the Peace Accords. Furthermore, an emphasis on community-led agroecology, adoption of the Escazú Agreement, and institutional support for peasant leadership can build inroads for the Petro government to truly address issues of environmental protection, sustainable agriculture, food sovereignty, and climate change. Thus, coca reform and new paradigms informing the implementation of the PNIS inherently entail untangling questions about territorial, Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and peasant rights, along with development and support in rural communities.

## US-Colombia Partnership Moving Forward

Coca and its associated impacts on human and environmental ecosystems is key to the peacebuilding process in Colombia. While President Duque aggressively pursued a return to forced eradication via aerial glyphosate fumigation, policy analysts, Indigenous and Afro-Colombian leaders, and smallholder or peasant farmers vehemently oppose this strategy. The health and biodiversity impacts would be enormous in terms of human illnesses, cancers, and deaths along with biodiversity loss, soil degradation, and water pollution; all while proving to be ineffective for coca crop eradication in the long term. Instead, producers, rural communities, and policy analysts are increasingly aware of the need to integrate sustainable, agroecological practices to combat multiple crises of climate change, ecosystem degradation, and rural hunger and health. Agrobiodiversity, especially in an era of increasing climatic change, species devastation, food insecurity, and resource-based conflicts, can potentially

be an important rallying point in peacebuilding processes across the globe. Agrobiodiversity encompasses livelihoods, food security, community wellbeing, and environmental impacts. In complex cases of illicit crops, agrobiodiversity is a critical juncture of how communities can move beyond the drug trade and foster democratic dialogues for their own development. Indigenous, smallholder farmer, and frontline-impacted community leadership is key in analyzing and addressing agrobiodiversity-centered peacebuilding initiatives and creating sustainable conflict resolution.

The Biden administration would best benefit by supporting Petro's new vision of illicit crop substitution and rural reform. By emphasizing community leadership, sustainability, and true structural transformation, Petro's administration is a leader in imagining pathways toward fostering sustainability, mitigating climate change crises, and fostering long-term peacebuilding in the aftermath of extreme conflict. All of these goals align with the Biden administration's stated hopes for partnership with Colombia, and following Petro's lead will open up new possibilities for US policy and paradigms regarding global 'War on Drugs' and peacebuilding efforts.

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