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2004 Coca and Opium Poppy Estimates for Colombia and the Andes

(Washington, D.C.) The U.S. Government has completed the 2004 annual estimate of coca cultivation and potential cocaine production for Colombia, as well as the opium poppy cultivation and potential heroin production estimate. These estimates are produced with survey-sampling techniques and satellite imagery, similar to techniques used to estimate agricultural crops throughout the United States.

Aerial eradication efforts sprayed more than 130,000 hectares of coca in Colombia last year, thwarting coca growers' efforts to expand the crop. Despite a statistically unchanged area under coca cultivation (114,000 hectares), potential production of cocaine continued the decline of the last three years, falling 7 percent in 2004 to 430 metric tons of pure cocaine, down from 460 metric tons for 2003 (and down dramatically from the peak of 700 metric tons estimated for 2001). The decline in potential production resulted from an increased percentage of fields that were newly-planted in response to eradication. Such fields are less productive than mature coca.

The Colombian coca crop has declined by more than a third from the high point of expansion in 2001 (169,000 hectares). This pattern holds throughout the Andes, where total cultivation in the measured areas of the three coca growing nations (Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia) has markedly decreased since 2001.

Further, overall potential cocaine production throughout the Andes continued its decline, falling 5 percent in 2004. Small increases in cultivation in Bolivia (with an estimated 65 metric tons of potential production in 2004) were offset by a comparable decline in cultivation in Peru (with an estimated 145 metric tons of potential production in 2004) and the above-noted decline in Colombian potential production. Total Andean cocaine production (currently estimated at 640 metric tons) has dropped nearly 30 percent (260 metric tons) since its peak of 900 metric tons in 2001.

Finally, the estimate shows that Colombian opium poppy cultivation fell 52 percent between 2003 and 2004. The estimated 4,400 hectares of opium poppy for 2003 decreased steeply to 2,100 hectares for 2004. There were an estimated 3.8 metric tons of potential heroin production in 2004 (down from 7.8 metric tons for 2003). More than 4,000 hectares of opium poppy were treated with herbicide in 2004 or manually eradicated.

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