

CONTRIBUTION TO UNODC IN THE THEMATIC SESSION.

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My name is Pedro J. Arenas García. I'm Colombian. In the 80s, like many other people, I went to work in the field collecting coca leaf, from the crops that grew in the region. I was just 13 years old and so I started to earn my own incomes.

I remember when adults commented that this crop was an illegal activity, and that is why at any time we could be arrested by the authorities. Faced with this fear, farmers increasingly penetrated remote areas of greater environmental importance, generating an increase in the rate of deforestation in the Amazon.

For two decades aerial spraying with the agrototoxic glyphosate against coca crops, generated losses of legal crops, broke down family economies based on that activity and led to human rights violations. My mother also lost her crop and she had to leave the field, leaving what she had to move to the nearest city and start her life again.

As a civic leader in my region, I have been promoting the defense of the human rights of indigenous people, farmers and Afro-descendants who plant coca for traditional and cultural purposes, as well as those families that do so to obtain base pasta.

During these years I have seen how stigmatization and persecution campaigns have been carried out on that plant and the farmers that live of it.

Currently, I am part of the Viso Mutop Corporation, an organization that is dedicated to accompanying indigenous, peasant and Afro-descendant communities that earn income from coca, poppy or marijuana crops. In recent years I have witnessed the commitment of the peasant families that uprooted their coca crops. They eradicated almost 40,000 hectares, which represent some 500 tons of cocaine per year, between 2017 and 2018, as part of the commitments to the Plan for voluntary crop substitution that was launched by mandate of the last Peace Agreement.

The voluntary substitution has shown that if community participation is possible to conclude work plans that allow the gradual overcoming of the illicit economy. But substitution is a process that takes time. It cannot be measured only in how many hectares are eradicated but in terms of how much access to development was propitiated in those communities. The substitution of crops must be tied to solving land problems by facilitating access to property for families that do not have it.

Likewise, the process of removing some plants to install others is insufficient in the contexts where the crops declared illicit grow. There, technical assistance, food security, productive projects, on-site crop transformation, infrastructure, market access and security are also required. Ultimately, crop substitution is linked to the access and security are also required. Ultimately, crop substitution is linked to the realization of the human rights.

More recently, the world has seen the drug laws of several countries evolve to allow marijuana crops to be used in the medical industry. Undoubtedly this allows to generate jobs, the payment of taxes, scientific progress and the supply of medicines to the population. However, we see with concern that the native communities (especially indigenous and peasant) are not being able to access the opportunities that the new market offers.

We call on States and the United Nations to fully incorporate into the crop substitution policies, the guiding principles of alternative development, a logical and appropriate sequence that facilitates the incorporation of communities into true development taking into account the objectives of sustainable development and full respect for human rights, which implies leaving behind the use of force, recognizing the citizenship of the families currently in these activities.

Also, we urge States and the United Nations to adopt measures that facilitate opportunities for communities in the medical cannabis industry, taking into account fair trade parameters for them.

Finally, we believe that UNODC can provide technical support to governments in many countries, promoting alternative rural development, without prejudice to the sovereignty of States. His role as a verifier of commitments, in the progressive reduction of illicit crops, cannot be affected by financing agreements with national governments that involve him departing from his neutral character and being a judge and part of eradication plans that make him lose legitimacy before populations.