



Colombian military forces search a poor neighborhood near Medellin for suspected assassins allied with the illegal international drug cartel operating from Colombia.

Drugs wash Americas with bloody violence

By Laurie Hansen
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — The bullet-riddled corpses that continue to bloody city streets this year bring home the enormity of a problem shared by cocaine supplier nations and their chief customer, the United States.

Throughout the Americas, from Bogota, Colombia, to suburban New York, from the rural Huallaga Valley in Peru to inner-city Milwaukee, the multibillion dollar cocaine industry has families mourning their loved ones.

It is a complex problem with no simple solution. Cocaine money means economic growth for entire regions in Peru and, perhaps, economic survival for Bolivia. For thousands of South American peasants who grow and harvest the coca plant from which the nitrogen-based compound called cocaine can be isolated, the drug trade means food on the table at the end of the day.

But as an indirect result of their labor, in the lower Manhattan sector of New York, school children "step over crack vials and needles on their way to school, and you can watch drug deals made in stairwells and elevators," Mary Bohlen, director of the Office of Substance Abuse Ministry for the Archdiocese of New York, told Catholic News Service in an Aug. 23 interview.

And the U.S. public has taken notice. Results of a new Gallup Poll released Aug. 15 say that U.S. teenagers and adults alike view drug abuse as the most important problem facing the nation — topping fear of war, unemployment, AIDS, crime, abortion and alcohol abuse.

The brutal assassination Aug. 18 of Luis Carlos Galan Sarmiento, Colombia's leading presidential candidate and a strong opponent of the drug trade, prompted Pope John Paul II to appeal to those responsible to "renounce these inexplicable and abominable gestures that have cost so much blood and tears."

The murder resulted in a crackdown on drug traffickers in Colombia and an announcement by Colombian President Virgilio Barco that he would extradite drug kingpins to the United States, whose justice system is believed to be less susceptible to threats and bribes than is the Colombian system.

"We in Colombia are living at a critical and painful hour," said a statement issued by the Colombian bishops' conference following Galan's murder. The "cruel" and "systematic" terrorism striking the Andean nation "now claims a victim that meant so much to Colombia ... an indefatigable worker for democracy and the common good," said the statement, which was signed by Cardinal Alfonso Lopez Trujillo of Medellin.

President Bush, meanwhile, praised Barco's efforts and ruled out dispatching U.S. troops to the South American nation. The president unveiled an international anti-drug strategy with a \$7.9 billion price tag Sept. 5.

Describing drugs as the "quicksand of our entire society," Bush outlined a national campaign involving law enforcement, community action, education, prevention and treatment. "They're suffocating individuals and families ... and all Americans must pull together" to extricate the country from the drug morass, he said.

Bush's \$7.9 billion fiscal 1990 anti-drug budget includes:

- \$350 million for state and local law enforcement.
- \$399 million for community-based drug abuse prevention programs.
- \$685 million in treatment of drug-abuse patients, including pregnant women and "cocaine babies."
- \$392 million for school-based drug education and prevention.
- \$1.47 billion for a crash program of prison construction.

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Father of drug traffickers asks pope to negotiate truce with government

BOGOTA, Colombia (CNS) — The father of three of Colombia's top narcotics traffickers has reportedly asked Pope John Paul II to help arrange a truce between the government and the drug cartels.

Fabio Ochoa Restrepo, 65, sent a letter to the pope suggesting that as part of a peaceful settlement to Colombia's current drug war, the confiscated properties of drug traffickers should be donated to the poor, according to news reports appearing Sept. 2.

Ochoa is the father of Jorge Luis Ochoa Vasquez, 40, who is believed to be the chief executive officer of the Medellin-based family cocaine business.

Jorge is aided by his brothers, Juan David, 41, and Fabio, 32, in managing the drug enterprise.

Jorge, nicknamed The Fat Man, is reputed to have a fortune of up to \$2 billion and is regarded as politically powerful. He is under two U.S. indictments and went into hiding when the Colombian government crackdown began this summer. The government seized millions of dollars worth of property belonging to the Ochoas and other "narcobaron" and arrested thousands of lower-level drug suspects.

The text of the elder Ochoa's letter, which was read during a French television report on the violence, echoed a similar message Ochoa sent to Colombian President Virgilio Barco Vargas a week earlier.

In that letter, Ochoa proposed that the government and drug cartels begin negotiations to end drug trafficking in the country in exchange for a general pardon for the traffickers.

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681 Brown Street (school basement)

Serving the Bullshead Neighborhood

Clothing Distribution: Saturdays 9:30-10:30 a.m.

Help us process your clothing gift by:

- Sending only clean clothing in good repair
- Labelling each item's size
- Packaging your donation in re-useable bags with twist ties or compact cartons with flaps.
- Limiting the weight to **25** pounds per box or bag
- Labelling the contents on the bag/box
- Pairing shoes, socks and gloves with a strong rubber band

We desperately need:

- Men's clothing of all types. There is a critical need for shoes, winter clothing and work apparel.
- Children, Infants and Maternity clothing
- Large-sized women's clothing
- Women's dresses and uniforms
- Grocery bags, pant hangers, clothes pins & heavy duty pipe racks on wheels

Due to Severe Space Limitations,

Please do not send:

- Household appliances, electronic devices, used toys, winter sports equipment and bric-a-brac items.
- Furniture or mattresses
- Women's blouses, slacks, suits and vests (over-supplied)
- Shoes, Socks and gloves without mates

Recommended Drop-Off Time for Clothing: Saturdays (10:15-11:15 a.m.) Please avoid the "Holiday Crush." Volunteers needed. For more information please call: **235-6511**. Please post this request.



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