TRANSCRIPT

"THE FUTURE OF COCA INDUSTRIALIZATION IN COLOMBIA: A PATHWAY TO DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE"

A conversation with Paul Gootenberg, David Restrepo, Dora Lucila Troyano Sanchez, Maria Clara Torres, Kasia Malinowska female, Diego Garcia-Devis

Moderated by Lucy Sherriff

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ANNOUNCER:

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KASIA MALINOWSKA:

Let me just-- offer a very brief welcome. My name is Kasia Malinowska. I direct the drug policy program here at OSF. And I wanted to mostly-- thank-- our panelists for-- first of all, great work on the report-- for-- for the presentations that-- and comments that they are-- are about to offer-- and to say that I had an opportunity to travel-- to-- to the region that we'll all be hearing about. I think it was three years ago, Diego? Three years ago, and really fell in love with it.

And so it-- it-- it feels really great to-- to be here, now that the report is-- available to us all. Diego, who will take over for me, has done a great job sort of moving the project-- along. So just thank you all for-- to all the people that contributed, that will contribute to making sure that coca-- that coca-- is discussed-- in a context of peace-- in Colombia and-- yeah-- Diego, over to you. Thanks.

DIEGO GARCIA-DEVIS:

Thank you, Kasia. Welcome, everyone. My name is Diego Garcia. I'm with the global drug policy program here at Open Society Foundations. As Kasia said, I'm-- I'm in charge of our program in Latin America. And-- we decided-- a few years ago to gravitate around-- the farmers and the coca growers'-- rights.

That meant to us a great challenge identifying partners in the region that we're able to-- promote and protect rights of people that have been deprived of their right to livelihood, their right to prom-- to cultivate-- an ancient plant like coca.

As you know, coca has been grown in the – in the region-- for different m-- purposes, for-- for centuries now. And the single convention-- the United Nations single convention on drugs basically change-- the meaning of that plan around the world.

Now what we see is-- the governments and states interpreting that convention and pressuring those communities to eradicate coca. That originally has limited the capacity that governments and communities have had to research and understand what benefits the plant country.

For the very first time we found researchers in the region that were able to demonstrate that a plant has different uses, and has illicit uses. And I'm very happy to say that-- after-- a few years of-- work with Dora Troyano and later with-- with David Restrepo, we are able to present the very first-- positive approach to coca in the region.

That means that Colombia has moved from only criminalizing-- coca plantations in Colombia to look at the plant-- differently. That means finding ways on how to make a living for those communities-- from a (UNINTEL) perspective on the users of coca.

So Dora has been working with those communities. We're gonna see a short video-- portraying and showing the communities themselves, so you have-- an image of what Dora has been promoting for almost 20 years now in the region. I'm happy to say that she is the first one in Colombia that has receive a permit to buy, transport, stock and research about coca uses.

So that's the major gain that we wanna show you today. Please feel free to take copies-- when you leave and-- come and talk to-- to the panelists later. So-- without any further ado, please-- we're gonna watch the-- the short film. And-- and later we'll-- we're gonna hear from-- from our panelists. Thank you.

LUCY SHERRIFF:

Good evening, everyone. My name is Lucy Sherriff and I'm a British journalist based in Colombia. I report-- primarily on social and economic issues for a variety of media outlets, including-- Public Radio International, Al Jazeera, the BBC, and The Atlantic.

The piece still has finally provided space for Colombia to address some of the pressing issues that have been neglected because of the 50-year conflict. These include development in rural and isolated areas, such as those highlighted in the report. Labor Minister Rafael Pardo, who I interviewed late last year, acknowledged that establishing a stable economy in remote regions is a key factor in sure-- in ensuring peace as a lasting entity.

In my reporting from Colombia I've witnessed there was a dire need for economic infrastructure, especially in rural areas. Up till now unfortunately this has not been a priority for the government. And so it seems creating innovation and industrialization from the bottom up is key.

There was a huge opportunity for coca, which is all-- already an established part of Colombian culture, to play an integral role in bringing income and prosperity to these areas. Not only does coca have its roots in ancient traditions, but thanks to its nutritional qualities, it could be-- it could have a prospective market on the international stage.

If coca can just manage to shake its bad PR image, there seems to be no reason why it cannot become the next bitaya (PH), quinoa, or maccha, and be the next big super food. So without further ado, I'd like to hand over to Paul Gootenberg. He's a SUNY distinguished professor of history and sociology, and chair of the history department at Stony Brook University. He is also the author of a number of books, including *Andean Cocaine: The Making of a Global Drug*. And he'll be exploring the challenge-- the changing (sorry) possibilities of coca.

PAUL GOOTENBERG:

Thank you, Lucy. Thank you to the OSF for this opportunity. I have to say it's (MIC NOISE) not everyday that-- an academic historian like myself opens up-- kind of a hot-- policy event like this, on the industrialization of coca. And I hope that a little bit of history's gonna help illuminate things for you.

Okay. So my introduction today-- I'm gonna lay out a few of the bigger contexts for the urgency of this remarkable project on coca industrialization in Colombia, especially coca's ever-changing roles and possibilities in the Andes. Two-- brief topics, I hope. Historically coca leaf's dramatic shifts in status over the last century or so, opening up-- a new space for coca innovation.

And second, geographically and politically over, say, the last decade, the dramatic divergence of coca possibilities in the three Andean nations and Colombia's unique opportunity here. Of course the historian in me, what I really like to get into today, and I'm sure there's not gonna be time for it, would be to go back to the 19th century, when there actually was a period of a global market in coca health products.

And it was very promising, before it got cut off by-- drug prohibition. But I think we'll have to leave that kind of excursion to-- the Q&A. Okay, so why don't we start by talking a little bit about-- coca's changing historical status and spaces.

Coca leaf, as opposed to its most famous alkaloid-- cocaine, is derived from the shrub Erthroxylum coca and is one of the oldest cultivars in the Andean region, about 5,000 to 8,000 years old. And as most of you probably know here, the use of coca as a ritual or as a community good, a medicine-- a labor enhancer, so on (the uses are innumerable), is deeply engrained in indigenous life ways, especially in the southern Andes.

Yet it's vital to grasp that coca is not some kind of timeless, eternal tradition, but has dramatically shifted its status and uses over time. Let me just give you a kind of timeline of the-- of these kind of historical ups and downs of the leaf, which have been sometimes very, very dramatic and are still going on.

Okay, so it's true that coca dates to some of the earlier Andean peoples, but only by the time of the Incas, that is the 13th and 14th century, did the leaf become elevated and regulated as a kind of sacred substance. After 1532, with the Spanish Conquest, the opposite occurs. Coca's status falls dramatically. The church branded it kind of a paganistic-- ritual. And there was a brief attempt to ban the leaf.

MALE AUDIENCE MEMBER:

When was that?

DIEGO GARCIA-DEVIS:

In the 1530s, 1550s, okay? But coca's use actually expanded throughout the Andes over the next three centuries under colonialism. That's because it became-- used as a labor stimulant. You probably all heard of the mines of Potosi. And it also began to infiltrate wider into communities.

It became a marker. As our anthropologists would call it, it beca-- became a marker of Indian or indigenous status in the colonial period. Now in the 19th century coca saw a new and basically unknown rise in its possibilities and its status as new Andean nations were formed and when the Germans discovered in 1860 this powerful alkaloid, cocaine, that's within the coca leaf.

So now coca was changing. Because it was linked to a modern miracle drug and a valuable medical commodity. So both national elites in these countries, as well as Americans and Europeans, became fascinated, especially medical men, with this leaf and its miraculous properties.

And this led to that brief period, three or four decades, when there actually was an active international market in coca products, basically health goods. The most famous of these was

Vin Mariani in Europe, one of mo-- more pioneering commodities of the late 19th century, and its copycat here in the United States, which was mixed more with sugar than with alcohol, Coca-Cola, which has its roots in this broad period (COUGH) of fascination with coca as a medicinal, coca as a health product.

By the way, I do wanna mention something that-- only a few historians would know. The term industrialization of coca is actually very, very old. And it goes back to this period of the late 19th century. But in the late 19th century it meant only one thing. It meant the production of medicinal cocaine and chiefly in Peru, where most of the cocaine was being made at that time.

Okay. So this was not-- this was only a prelude to another set of changes. In the early 20th century coca's fortunes radically changed again. Its status was f-- fell dramatically with the rise of glogal (SIC) drug prohibitions and related racial addiction pseudo sciences. It's a long and complex story. But by the 1920s Creole elites in Peru, Bolivia and even Colombia medicalized coca.

They embraced this new kind of addiction idea and began to brand coca as a kind of mass degenerating social disease of the indigenous masses. That is coca became equated with cocaine for the first time. Coca also lost its honorable place as a modern export abroad, as the U.S. and other places paradoxically banned import of this completely harmless leaf, because of their dread of the drug cocaine.

By the 1940s restrictions on coca began to be in the air, a move epitomized in the Andes by the famous 1949, 1950 UN-- mission of inquiry the coca leaf to the Andes. All of this turn against coca culminates in the 1961 UN single convention treaty, still (as most of you know) the kind of bedrock treaty of global drug-- control, drug prohibition, which not only for the first time listed coca itself as a drug, but-- launched-- the concept of actually eliminating the plant and indigenous habit-- of course in a kind of a quarter-- century span. That would've been 1986 or so.

Okay. Yet the worst was to come after that. And that is coca criminalization. In the 1970s and 1980s, the birth of modern circuits of criminal and illicit cocaine, a long-term result (I would argue) of the prohibition system itself, led to coca's most beleaguered stage ever, paradoxically at a time when its cultivation spread were s-- d-- reached unprecedented proportions across the eastern Andes.

Cocaine booms in Bolivia, Peru and finally Colombia, and spiraling violence and corruption around this lucrative drug led to U.S.-inspired campaigns to actually eradicate the leaf, as it was called during that time, at its source. These were erratically carried out-- more so in one place than others.

But what this was-- this was not only-- a criminalization of cocaine, but this was also importantly a criminalization of people. The tens of thousands of new cocalero growers in hot spots, like the Chiparay (PH), Whyjaga (PH) and Putumayo. And of course, among other

paradoxes, this post-1980s global drug war, targeting coca, caught wasted billions and intensified bloodshed in coca regions.

But ultimately did almost nothing to stem the plantings-- ballooning all across the eastern Andes. But that's not even the end of the story there. Because there-- there's been a recent turn in the history of coca that is really the prelude to what we're looking at here today. And that is, starting in the 1970s, making coca story even more sinuous and complex, the opposite countermove-- takes off. And that is the so-called revindication of coca. And it's very little-studied, how this actually occurred. An intriguing coalition of new indigeneous movements, global anthropologists and drug specialists, in a backlash to the repression and violence in the Andean drug war, re-embraced herbal coca leaf.

Coca's status quickly rose, this time as a noble, healthy and essential element of beleaguered Andean cultures, and basically as the opposite of the savage capitalist drug, cocaine. And this is a view that's particularly pronounced, as probably most of you know, in Bolivia, where it's become really-- an integral part of what is-- nationalism in the country today. So in some, after about year 2000 it's safe to say that coca's separate kind of safe and symbolic s-- space has been largely restored, the plant that is, the leaf that is. I would not say the same for the tens of thousands of cocaleros who are still being persecuted under un-- outdated-- drug laws.

So let me just sum this up. Do I have more time or is it-- a few minutes? Okay. Well, I hope the-- the main takeaway that you get from this is that-- you can see now that coca leaf, rather than having kind of one-- static role or meaning, has significantly shifted over time. Most of the time, over the last century, grossly linked-- in a dialectic with the drug, cocaine. But for a variety of reasons, today coca has unprecedented, dynamic possibilities, including a return to coca industrialization and medical usage-- that briefly flourished a century-- before-- drug prohibitions took hold. So I guess I'll stop there and let the show go on.

LUCY SHERRIFF:

(MIC NOISE) Thank you, Paul. I also now have the honor of introducing the report's two authors, Dora Troyano Sanchez and David Restrepo, as well as Maria Clara Torres, an internationally-published researcher in coca. Dora is an instructor and researcher with the National Training Service Center in Colombia, and has worked for nearly 20 years with coca farmers, researching and promoting the coca leaf as an agriculture proje-- product that can contribute to the economic development of coca-growing communities.

David was-- works on drug reform policy and product innovation in Colombia and Peru, with a focus on the coca leaf. Maria is a Ph.D. candidate in the history department at Stony Brook Univeristy. Her research focuses on coca in Colombia from the early 1950s to the 2000s. So now they're all gonna take to the stage and we can have more of a discussion about the report.

DAVID RESTREPO:

Thank you, Lucy. Can you--

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

DAVID RESTREPO:

Yeah, so I think-- I'd like to recapitulate some of the points that you've seen in-- in the movie-- and some of the points, Paul-- has raised. Because they really form the-- the story of-- of this-- report. I think wh-- what we need to say, you know, to begin the story is that-- in Colombia the attitude towards-- coca growers has been basically to try-- to eradicate and-- and substitute their crops.

Like Peru and Bolivia, we have not really entertained-- an alternative-- from-- from a state perspective, that has never really featured in the discourse. And-- and the motivation for this of course-- the-- the main-- story that we hear is that we needed to get coca to get rid of cocaine at source, you know, to stop the cartels-- the guerrillas and the paramilitaries.

But the other thing that w-- has always been going on with coca in Colombia is an older motivation. And it is this derision towards coca and its associate-- association with-- with indigenous cultures in which coca is a very prominent part. So the-- you know, the goal in that move was to suppress anything that linked us to-- our indigenous ancestors.

We are-- a very mixed race-- culture-- a culture that's a product of-- of many-- peoples coming together and mixing. And the indigenous element of it is-- is very prominent. So as we were-- we're looking at-- drafting this-- this report, you know-- we-- have (THROAT CLEAR) scanned the-- the drug policy scholarship.

And anybody who has looked at the evidence this passionately has found that this putative approach towards coca just doesn't seem to work. It strengthened the guerrillas and the paramilitaries by alienating the rural communities-- where coca was grown, and really tearing them apart and pushing them into the hands of those very armed groups and cartels that the policy was su-- was trying to weaken.

And it is really only until 2016, with the peace agreement-- between the government and FARC, that Colombia has been starting to think differently about the coca issue. It is the first time that we have started talking about consensus-based strategies for development and drug control, and imagined that communities could maybe decide the future of their lives and their properties-- themselves.

So what we do with-- with the coca industrialization report is to maybe take another step forward. And it's one where we try to acknowledge the right of coca farmers-- be they indigenous or-- otherwise. The community that you saw, Lerma, is-- you know, multi-ethnic

community, people that will-- will not associate themselves as-- as indigenous, but as mixed race.

So the right of these coca farmers to grow coca, if they choose to, for the variety of beneficial and (I would even say) irreplaceable uses that coca offers. So in the (NOISE) report we cover-- this long history that-- that coca has-- in Colombia. We scan the-- the laws that have tried to suppress coca for, you know-- a long time-- and then begin to look at the-- actual the cultural and economic value that the plant-- offers, both to indigenous and to multi-ethnic communities.

So we start by presenting-- the nutritional uses that the plant offers-- reporting on-- recent-- study of the nutritional content that coca has. We similarly-- look at the-- the-- that contentious legal history of the plant and identify-- the small, gray area that, you know, currently allows indigenous communities to grow coca and sell coca-based products-- but that prevent-- the plant from really accessing the potential it has-- within a formal commercial-- setup.

So right now coca retains a very restrictive terrain, one that really prevents it from-- from reaching its-- its potential in nutrition, medicine and agriculture. Under different circumstances-- as we have-- as Paul briefly mentioned, Colombia (like Peru and Bolivia today) would see coca as a source of-- of pride and maybe even of opportunity.

You know, at-- at elevation coca is-- helps with altitude sickness. Coca is a super food. It has almost as much protein as-- as beans and lentils. It's a remarkable source of calcium, phosphorus and iron. As an input in fertilizers coca not only provides a low-cost source of nitrogen, but also appeals-- appears to repel insects.

So it helps reduce the need-- for pesticides. As a stimulant, there is not evidence-- that it causes harm or addiction. It's a steady, constant source of energy that also helps people feel calmer and more focused-- while suppressing the appetite.

So during-- while you're chewing coca, you may not need to snack. It is providing nutrition to you. And it is also making you feel like you're satiated. So if we could overcome this stigma that the plant has, and the-- and the fear that has prevented us researching-- all the-- valuable uses of-- of-- of coca, we would find that this plant could suddenly be a source of social good and wealth, rather than a fuel for war.

This wouldn't solve all-- all of our problems, either in development or-- in drugs. But it would certainly make a valuable contribution. The final component of the report-- looks at the-- horizons of the coca leaf. Where should we go next? And to do this, we look at the experience of SENA-- and the town of Lerma (PH), which you saw earlier-- in the state of Cauca, which remains the third-largest producer of coca in Colombia.

And-- Dora will-- will cover this-- with a lot more-- richness than I can-- with her, you know, two-decade experience working in the area. But I think what is really-- beautiful about Lerma is how Lerma has reclaimed its-- its identity by accepting coca as a part of who

they are and-- as a part of the-- the-- connection that we have to our ancestors and to the land.

And it's through that process that the conditions have been set for-- experiencing or exploring the valuable uses of coca. And I think that experience is also very-- valuable template for policymakers and for reformers. What it does is it-- it tells us that-- where we need to start is understanding what communities need-- doing it-- conducting research, experimentation and innovation based on those community needs that we have identified, reforming policies-- with cons-- considering how, through those-- technological innovations-- we can address the needs that the community-- has identified for itself.

Through that process I think-- Dora and SENA-- obtained the first permit in Colombia's history for conducting research with coca. And I think they're helping to set the research foundation that will help us demonstrate how important coca leaf is in our society-- and potentially-- put-- punitive drug policy behind for good. So-- I'll now switch over to Dora-- who has led these efforts for decades and, working with communities, has been showing us that a different path is possible.
(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

DORA LUCILA TROYANO SANCHEZ:

Buenas tardes para todas.

DORA'S TRANSLATOR:

Good afternoon to everyone.

DORA LUCILA TROYANO SANCHEZ:

Muchas gracias. Buenas tardes, hija.

DORA'S TRANSLATOR:

Good afternoon (LAUGH) to my daughter. (LAUGHTER)

(FOREIGN LANGUAGE NOT TRANSCRIBED)

DORA'S TRANSLATOR:

She came first here. She-- she was the most interested person here. She mentioned she was here on time (LAUGH) Very much on time.

(FOREIGN LANGUAGE NOT TRANSCRIBED)

DORA'S TRANSLATOR:

First of all, thank you for taking the time to come here and for taking the time to-- in your agendas, making the space to come listen about this topic. This would be our first baby, and a baby with many fathers, I would say-- we can count among them Diego and-- I am missing probably a couple people.

(FOREIGN LANGUAGE NOT TRANSCRIBED)

DORA'S TRANSLATOR:

Kasia and--

(OVERTALK)

DORA'S TRANSLATOR:

--many people here from Open that-- that contributed to this-- to this--

(FOREIGN LANGUAGE NOT TRANSCRIBED)

DORA'S TRANSLATOR:

And my-- and my colleagues from SENA too. I wanna thank you-- them for the-- for this first-- baby that he-- we-- that-- that had-- I have in my hands this time.

(FOREIGN LANGUAGE NOT TRANSCRIBED)

DORA'S TRANSLATOR:

This-- work-- in the beginning I thought it was gonna-- gonna be a simple one. But as I got into it, it became-- I figured I became-- it-- it become complicated-- as I enter in-- I c-- continue-- doing-- doing it. Because-- coca is not a unidirectional-- entity or product, it's-- it-- it has really taken an-- and it really spreads out or-- or-- takes many different facets-- depending on the-- on the cultural-- the-- the government approach-- the mood-- many other-- factors that really change the-- what coca means for different regions in the-- in the-- in the Andes.

(FOREIGN LANGUAGE NOT TRANSCRIBED)

DORA'S TRANSLATOR:

To just talk about the leaf-- it belongs to the family of electrocylises (PH) or electrosylasius (PH). One of them has-- there are three in total. And one of them-- has this-- in its con-- content, this alkaloid.

(FOREIGN LANGUAGE NOT TRANSCRIBED)

DORA'S TRANSLATOR:

Which would be-- which we know as coca-- coca-- cocaine. Thank you.

(FOREIGN LANGUAGE NOT TRANSCRIBED)

DORA'S TRANSLATOR:

Distributed in Bolivia, Peru and Ecuador.

(FOREIGN LANGUAGE NOT TRANSCRIBED)

DORA'S TRANSLATOR:

It's a restricted or limited area by policy. They cannot-- larger-- in any part-- part of the world can-- it's allowed to have-- that large-- those large amounts of-- of plantation or-- or-- or-- cultivation-- growth of the-- of the leaf.

(FOREIGN LANGUAGE NOT TRANSCRIBED)

DORA'S TRANSLATOR:

As-- Professor Gootenberg has expressed, this plant-- has been accompanying or being-- part of the life of-- in-- indigenous come-- the Indian community. And-- it's-- this-- and up until the last half of the century that-- after probi-- prohibition, that this-- plant has-- has received-- has-- been affected by this-- that-- this-- program or this-- pressure-- on-- on it and-- and on the communities that have-- that grow it-- grow it.

(FOREIGN LANGUAGE NOT TRANSCRIBED)

DORA'S TRANSLATOR:

And-- after-- them-- the-- drug-- convention-- when that was-- established or-- or-- presented to the countries-- Bolivia, Peru and Colombia, Bolivia and Peru-- opted out of--

of-- of certain-- guidelines or cert-- opted out of it completely-- on this totality because-- of the effect that was gonna-- for-- for respect to their indigenous communities.

(FOREIGN LANGUAGE NOT TRANSCRIBED)

DORA'S TRANSLATOR:

So-- Colombia did not s-- take a step away or-- or-- or-- or are-- resigned or didn't submit to-- submit it actually to the-- to the-- to the-- to this convention. And-- and by doing that they-- they for-- they ignored and c-- and-- and put-- and-- and didn't take into consideration the-- the-- the tradition of the-- not just indigenous but mysti-- Mestizo communities that-- that cultivated or grow-- grew it.

(FOREIGN LANGUAGE NOT TRANSCRIBED)

DORA'S TRANSLATOR:

At this point we have 130,000 families involved in the commercialization and growth of-- of the coca leaf. And it's all done illegally. It's-- it's-- they are-- the-- they-- they-- they market it. But it's all considered illegal.

(FOREIGN LANGUAGE NOT TRANSCRIBED)

DORA'S TRANSLATOR:

So when we talk about the installization of the coca leaf-- we are talking about creating-- an environment for the pro-- produ-- for the grower and product-- people who produce it or to go-- market it, to find a space to-- to do it-- to-- to just-- do-- carry the-- their business or carry their-- it's assistance-- subsistence.

(FOREIGN LANGUAGE NOT TRANSCRIBED)

DORA'S TRANSLATOR:

So for-- it's-- this might sound obvious for other countries. But in-- in Colombia we have many legal restrictions. So the goal of this-- report is to-- provide-- a way or a road-- and roadmap for-- for this-- industrialization and-- and-- and provide-- change a little bit the game on-- on the question of-- of the coca leaf.

(FOREIGN LANGUAGE NOT TRANSCRIBED)

DORA'S TRANSLATOR:

So the hopes that we have with the people who read this report is to-- to s-- to-- to give value to this-- the people who are growing-- farmers, the coca farmers, not just because they are growing or are-- or marketing the coca leaf-- but also because they have a connection to the-- to their s-- to the soil, to-- and the environment that surrounds them. And they have respect for-- for their-- for the livelihood that surrounds them, for how they make a living.

(FOREIGN LANGUAGE NOT TRANSCRIBED)

DORA'S TRANSLATOR:

At the beginning I thought-- we thought we had the answer for the-- for the question. But as soon as we answered it-- a thousand other questions emerged-- came up.

(FOREIGN LANGUAGE NOT TRANSCRIBED)

DORA'S TRANSLATOR:

So that's where we're at right now. We want-- more peo-- more to join us-- in the investigation-- and the-- discussion about this topic-- not just-- to find viable-- viable and also workable-- ways to-- for the dust-- industrialization and to-- put an end to this-- terrible conflict that-- painful conflict that we have-- we've had in Colombia.

(FOREIGN LANGUAGE NOT TRANSCRIBED)

DORA'S TRANSLATOR:

So please-- when you see in the market some other products out-- apart-- other than-- other than Coca-Cola and als-- also-- obviously you are free to-- to consume cocaine if you want to. But-- all-- but if you find any other product, please use it, consume it-- use it-- for-- for yourselves. Try to-- if you see-- product that b-- a coca-based product in the market, use it and-- and-- incorporate it into your s-- to your life, if you can.

LUCY SHERRIFF:

Thank you very much, David and Dora. That was--

DORA'S TRANSLATOR:

Mucha gracias--

LUCY SHERRIFF:

--incredibly insightful.

DORA'S TRANSLATOR:

--we-- (FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

LUCY SHERRIFF:

I'd now like to--

(OVERTALK)

LUCY SHERRIFF:

--Maria Clara, who is going to be-- commenting on the report on the current challenges in Colombia.

MARIA CLARA TORRES:

Good afternoon, everyone. Well, I'm delighted to be here and to talk about coca and the challenges for post-conflict Colombia precisely, exactly five days before presidential elections in Colombia, when, for the first time-- a leftist candidate is one of the fro-- frontrunners, which is significant.

Because thousands of leftist people have been killed and assassinated in the-- over the past decades, just because of the stigma associated with the FARC. So-- I think that whether or not the leftist candidate is elected-- I think that in-- in any case-- he will be p-- the chief of the opposition if he is not elected.

And the left will have to be taken into account. And that matters. Because that candidate is one of the-- is one-- is-- is a staunch critic of the war on drugs. So anyway-- so I have entitled my presentation Making Peace with Coca: Challenges For Post-Conflict Colombia.

And recent years calls for rethinking the war on drugs seem to open up new democratizing opportunities for grassroots coca communities. For half a century the Andean countries have been on the frontline, on the frontline of the war on drugs.

And now even-- it seems that even the elites are questioning the effectiveness of the strategy. This ju-- the region as one of the-- journalists said-- said-- I hope in quotation

marks, "The regions seem tired of paying the price for America's war on its favorite vices." I-- oh, I-- end-- end of quote.

So at least in Colombia it seemed it was clear-- or it is clear now that neither, for at least part of the elites, or the most progressive elites, that neither military intervention nor alternative development have worked-- has worked. So that means that neither the cart nor the stick has actually worked.

Because-- a significant amount of cocaine are still coming out of the country. And after billions of dollars and pesos spent on their Plan Colombia, coca actually-- returned to the-- to the previously fumigated areas and act-- and-- and also spread to new areas.

So it seems that, as Colombian journalists rightly stated, that-- at least part of the-- it seems that at least part of the elite are understanding what one-- one-- of the Colombian journalists stated once that-- he said, "Illicit coca can neither be created nor destroyed, but only displaced."

So in addition to the call for it to-- in addition to these-- calls for-- drug policy reform-- there was hope and Colombia that bringing an end to the conflict with the FARC would actually solve Colombia's drug problem. So-- the government promised land reform and investment in the countryside in the periphery actually, in exchange for eradication of coca-- for coca eradication.

And-- with the peace agreements the FARC would no longer-- that was what-- part of what the negotioation was about -- the FARC would no longer be an obstacle to coca eradication. And-- but they would actually become-- part of the solution. So the FARC committed to cut off all ties to the drug trade.

But from the beginning m-- I argued from the beginning of the negotations, I argued that the peace deal with the FARC could not be assessed by the reduction in the number of coca hectares. The-- the disarmament of a guerilla of more than 10,000 fighters was already an achievement.

And in the most optimistic scenario, if actually rural reforms were to be carried out, were to be implemented-- they could actually improve the livelihoods of grassroots coca communities and provide relief to them, which is of course a desirable outcome.

But in any case, the peace agreement with the FARC would not quash the cocaine industry. I argued that, while cocaine remained an internet-- while cocaine remains an internationally-prescribed substance, the elevated price is driven by this prohibition, would compel the production for a criminal black market.

So aiming at full legalization of cocaine was clearly not a realistic goal for a peace agreement. But decriminalization of small coca producers seemed reasonable. I mean, if-- if it was not time for radical change, it was perhaps possible to humanize-- what they call humanize the war on drugs.

In fact, the Colombian version of this is humanization of the war on drugs. Part of this global m-- movement in Colombia would be expressed by perhaps-- a possible decriminalization of at least small-scale-- producers of coca. And so the-- the peace agreement did seek-- a more peaceful approach to coca farming communities.

But the peace agreement, the peace deal, actually failed to specify who were considered small-scale producers. So-- did-- the-- this decision or this definition of who are-- who are to be-- consider-- small-- small-- small cocaleros, s-- small producers of coca-- we-- w-- was-- was left actually to the legislators, to Congress.

So-- and recently the Santos administration, the President Santos drafted a bill seeking a differentiated penal-- penal treatment for coca growers. Unfortunately-- our-- so the bill w-- the bill has been sent to Congress. It has not been voted yet. It has not been debated.

But it has to be debated and voted in the coming days. But-- as of today the bill seems-- seems v-- disappointing. In what sense? In the sense that it is not an indefinite exemption from criminal charges for small coca growers. So there-- the bill has two-- is two main components. And I'll explain it very quickly. It-- it's-- it seeks to shield-- from criminal persecu-- from criminal prosecution, small farmers with plots no bigger than 1.78 hectares.

Just to give you an idea, according to UNODC-- the average farm-- the average coca farm in Colombia is one hectare. So-- the-- the-- the bill has defined small coca hectares-- those who own-- plots or who occupy plots no bigger than 1.78 hectares.

That's one of the components. The other component-- oh, but then-- but then-- they shield them from criminal prosecution. But that means that they have to sign up for-- substitution agreement. They still have to substitute. I mean, they're not prosecuted. The-- but the condition is that they have to eradicate coca.

So it's kind of-- it's-- it's almost like an administrative measure. It's just-- a measure so that the government can actually-- s-- implement alternative development projects-- and people can benefit from these projects without being prosecuted, you know?

Because if they are illegal, then the government shouldn't be-- shouldn't be imp-- implementing-- programs-- rural programs, right? Shouldn't-- they-- so-- so they shouldn't be-- they couldn't bene-- they could not benefit from this.

So the second component is to release small coca f-- farmers from jail. In that would affect appropriately 250 people who are actually incarcerated-- for-- owning or for occupying plots of coca. And that is-- kind of a reduced amount of people, if one considers that almost 400,000 people depend on coca for their survival in Colombia now.

So-- this bill is a temporary-- it's a temporary provision to allow small coca farmers to benefit from alternative development programs without being prosecuted. It does not legalize indefinitely the production of small amounts of coca.

And the bill comes after the-- the-- after-- the-- that the-- the-- the Trump administration threatened Colombia, threatened to decertify Colombia as the coper-- cooperative partner in the-- in the dru-- in drug control eff-- efforts. So-- I think that-- like, this period of-- of-- of-- or-- or the-- the initial idea that the peace agreement had, of-- seeking a more peaceful approach to coca growers-- is not-- hasn't been-- is now-- is not-- is not clear anymore, at least not by Congress-- at this moment.

I think-- this is-- this is-- Colombia is-- I mean, at a year and a half after the signing of the peace agreement, Colombia hasn't really made much progress in going beyond the prohibitionist paradigm. Colombia has continued to wage the war on drugs while implementing very slowly the rural reform promised in the peace agreement.
So they are doing both things. They are trying and they're doing very-- very slowly to do rural re-- to-- to carry out rural reforms in the periphery, but at the same time-- they are waging the war on drugs. They are f-- for the-- they're-- they are implementin' forced eradication.

So-- and here's what I argue, is the prohibitionist approach, with its corollary military intervention, is a serious obstacle to consolidating peace in Colombia. Counter narcotics campaigns have continued to spark violence, human right abusers and social unrest.
So now, after the peace agreement, it seems that the communities are-- are actually caught in the fight between illegal armed groups for the control of the territories once oversaw by the FARC. And that is-- that includes the old theory -- ELN guerilla, new brands of paramilitaries, including-- and also the Sinaloa Cartel, Mexico.

So since the signing on the revised peace agreement in November, 2016, illegal armed groups have killed-- have killed hundreds of community leaders for embracing coca substitution programs. And to make matters worse, now the police has access to remote coca growing areas-- that were once controlled-- that were once controlled by the FARC.

So instead this renewed acc-- this new access-- the-- the-- now that the police has access to these-- to this area, instead of improving the security of people, it is putting them in harm's way. And what do I mean by this? It's-- for instance-- a few months ago in the municipality of Tomaco Nadinio (PH), the police-- the police opened fire on a crowd who had gathered to resist forced eradication.

And they killed at least seven coca farmers. So it seems that now the situation is a bit-- is-- is even worse, that the police can have access to these areas. Because grassroots communities are-- are now threatened-- whether they pull out coca or not.

W-- they are threatened if they pull out coca by illegal or armed groups. And if they-- and if they don't, by the police. So Colombia will not achieve-- I argue that Colombia will not achieve lasting peace until it actually stops creating seed beds for drug trafficking gangs.

And that means legalizing the production of small amounts of coca. Coca industrialization could potentially become a promising economic tool for post-conflict, as it's shown in the report by Dora Troyano and David Restrepo. Yet as the-- as Diego Garcia rightly point--

pointed out in the forward, and with an open quotation mark, he says, "One cannot be naïve and suggest that coca industrialization will fully absorb delete-- de-- the-- the illicit market."

So-- I think-- and I-- I-- I-- I-- I honor-- argue that it is necessary to make peace with coca. Hmm? And that's one of the challenges of-- of post-conflict Colombia. And that means legalizing the production of limited amounts of coca for the drug market, as controversial as this statement might be.

But in Colombia-- by contrast to the other-- by contrast to Bolivia, for instance, the vast majority of the leaves are planted to supply the drug market. Hmm? Only 3% of the population self-identifies as indigenous. And not all of these ethnic groups have actually an ancestral tradition of coca consumption, hmm?

So the-- the nasas, of the north of Cauca, which are kind of the emblematic indigenous group with-- ancestral ties to coca, we have to say that-- daily consumption of coca, as it still happens in-- in the Yungas in Bolivia I guess, daily consumption in the north of Cauca by-- nasas was extinguished long before the 1980s cocaine boom, hmm?

It was extinguished before the cocaine boom, and mainly due to-- to racism, although the-- the histories more complex. But even the report also-- and-- that's why I like the report. The-- the report also mentioned that-- the 1940s-- public health campaigns held by the hygienists, by the modernist-- physicians, right, to eradicate coca consumption and to eradicate-- cheecha-- for instance.

So today even in Cauca the use of coca-- the use of coca is only-- is only reserved or-- coca is-- is used even in the north of Cauca on special occasions by religious authorities. That said-- that said, there is a movement, there is an emergent movement as I think-- I-- as-- as-- as-- as Professor Paul Gootenberg mentioned, there's-- that-- the reason a movement to reaffirm and to reinvent culture-- cultural identity, and to reinvent and reaffirm the roots to ancestral coca.

But even the nasa-- even the nasa produce mostly to supply the drug market. They supply to produce-- the Sinaloa Cartel, right? And-- and they don't-- only produce coca, but they also produce cannabis, okay? But there is a movement. And with that I will conclude. And that-- I conc-- I will just conclude with this, is that almo-- after almost half a century of-- half a century, people from different backgrounds in Colombia in-- such as indigenous group— Afro-Colombian and Mestizos have-- have-- have-- planted coca.

And now I-- I think we have to go beyond a dichotomy of-- if-- if they have an instrumental relationship with the plant or if they have-- if they have-- an ancestral-- or a cultural identity. I think that now in Colombia, after almost half a century, there is a Mestizo and Colonno (PH) coca culture in Colombia.

And we have to acknowledge that. And that is different from the-- the-- the-- the-- probably

w-- with the-- with the cultural size that they could have in Bolivia. But-- but there is a Mestizo and Colonno coca culture. And-- and that's why I think that one of the challenges for post-conflict Colombia is to make peace with coca now. Thank you.

LUCY SHERRIFF:

Thank you very much, everyone, for your comments. I believe we now have some time for questions from the audience. (APPLAUSE) If I could ask you to keep them concise, that would be very helpful, (BACKGROUND VOICE) as I'm very conscious we're limited on time. We have a microphone that's gonna be passed around.

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER:

I have three brief statements. I have always thought-- now always, but for very long time, that controversial subjects like this should not be promulgated without the other side offering the opposite view. I'm thinking I have two granddaughters in junior high school. And if they thought that coca was all right, the-- they might be offered it and they might try it. And I do have an experience to tell everybody here. And maybe you'll understand then. I-- I have--

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER:

I'm gonna ask you to-- to tell me what's wrong with what I'm saying. Because I really would like to know. I have a girlfriend who has a grands-- son who f-- had three car accidents under the influence of marijuana and threatened his mother that, if she didn't buy him another car, he was going to tell the police that she had alcohol parties in her house. It did something to his brain. I wanna know how you debate what I just said.

LUCY SHERRIFF:

So-- so what exactly is the question, in relation to the report?

FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER:

The question is should you be allowed to promulgate this? And how do you-- how do you protect our young children? How do you th-- make them think otherwise, that it's-- it's not all right? Because we have influ-- we have children whose minds are not developed yet. How do you-- (BACKGROUND VOICE) how do you prevent all that?

LUCY SHERRIFF:

Okay. So perhaps--

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

LUCY SHERRIFF:

Perhaps a good question to answer would be how do you-- how do you ensure the public knows the difference between coca-- the nutritional value of coca and cocaine? 'Cause obviously coca has a very bad PR image. Because it is, you know, used to make cocaine. So how do you try and differentiate that? Is it-- is it a PR campaign that needs to run? Is it-- is it sort of from the bottom up education needs to happen?

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

DORA'S TRANSLATOR:

My answer might sound cliché. But-- we are--

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

DORA'S TRANSLATOR:

We're focused on-- thank you. We are focused-- we are-- the-- pur-- purpose of our study is to find an integral use for the coca leaf-- the topic of-- of the consumption, traffic and-- and other things that are related to that, to the drug-- are topics that should be-- addressed by special people who are into this and-- investigating this or studying this topic.

Our role here, our intention is to-- find-- a more integral use for the-- for-- for the-- for the-- for the leaf-- for the coca leaf-- as powder or as-- as-- flour or other uses that-- that-- that we have presented. But that-- that-- I would say that-- that topic of-- of-- of consumption-- and traffic and other things-- has to be left to other-- they have to l-- left to people who are more versed or who are studying the topic-- have been studying the topic.

LUCY SHERRIFF:

(MIC NOISE) perhaps, David, you could also explore-- you know, how can communities ensure that, if coca is legislated, that it's used for illicit purposes. Or is that more of a government-- or is that-- can that be self-regulated within the communities?

DAVID RESTREPO:

Well-- well, back to-- both of those points. I think-- I just wanted to emphasis that science has not found any negative effects of coca leaf-- so far. And-- when there has been research, it's very difficult to do research with coca leaf. We're trying to change that. But-- when there has been research, it has not found that coca leaf leads to any of those uses.

It's a little bit-- it's like a little-- it's like a coffee, slightly stronger, potentially more effective-- and doesn't create as many jitters. But-- but anyway, in terms of the-- the control of-- of-- coca leaf, so that it's not-- diverted into, you know, the boogieman, cocaine-- I think the-- the-- the-- I think-- per-- Bolivia offers-- some interesting live examples of that, as well as Peru.

I think in neither of these countries, if you look at-- consumption rates for the variety of drugs that there are-- first, they're lower than here. Secondly, the-- you know, the-- the-- supply chains for coca leaf-- in-- I think Paul would be-- a great person to answer this as well.

There are-- there a regulatory-- framework for commercializing coca leaf that-- enables you to access-- coca tea, coca flour in a variety of products. And it's not associated with diversion into-- cocaine. It's really complicated to make cocaine from these products that have been turned into packaged goods.

It's much easier to go get it f-- get fresh-- coca leaves in, you know, the remote areas where it is grown. So it's not-- I wouldn't say it's a very large problem. And the tracability mechanisms, for which there are many in-- in cannabis-- they're growing and for the pharmaceutical industry there's-- there are a good-- you know, transportation practices that can be used-- almost copy/pasted for leaves. So I don't believe that that's a very significant concern.

MARIA CLARA TORRES:

I would also add that-- that you're right-- that they're right, that addiction is a very pri-- it's very problematic and that-- the consumers and the producers are the most vulnerable (SLURS)-- vulnerable (SLURS)-- vulnerable actors, and that they have to be protected definitely. So-- but I also know that thinking about a world free of drugs is unrealistic, and the that cost of the war on drugs are higher and have-- are higher in terms of human rights. Because the producers are carrying the heaviest load, right?

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

MARIA CLARA TORRES:

So I think-- so I think (BACKGROUND VOICE) that-- at least in terms of human rights, if human rights are important and-- and that's our approach, right-- the war on drug hasn't worked. It hasn't worked. It hasn't worked for 40 years, okay?

And there is still cocaine coming out of Colombia, of Bolivia and of Peru, even though the high cost in-- in human rights. So-- the costs are very high. And it is necessary to-- to make peace with those-- with the most vulnerable. And that means to protect the consumers and to protect the producers, who are the poorest one in this-- in this story.

LUCY SHERRIFF:

So I know-- Dora had something else very quickly to add. And then I think we'll move on to another question.

(FOREIGN LANGUAGE NOT TRANSCRIBED)

DORA'S TRANSLATOR:

We-- I'd like to mention-- the study and-- the-- the-- data we have gathered from-- from Cow—(PH)

(FOREIGN LANGUAGE NOT TRANSCRIBED)

DORA'S TRANSLATOR:

Lerma Cowka (PH). Sorry. And the-- and that-- that was-- that shows that-- the grou-- the-- this is a very-- the community has very-- very-- not-- it's-- it's a community that has worked on their own-- ways of bringing their proposal to the-- all the way up to the legislature.

In other words, they have been able to develop or design a-- normative-- for how they carry-- how they ap-- represented-- a proposal. And this has been heard by the legislature. And so this will be another way of-- of doing policy, in terms of-- of-- how we can change-- cha-- change the-- the-- change the-- the approach, not from the-- from the top to the bottom, but from the bottom up-- from the bottom up.

LUCY SHERRIFF:

Were there any other questions from the audience? Yes, the lady-- here in the glasses.

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER:

Thanks, everybody. I was just curious if everyone could maybe comment a little bit more-- I mean, you speak a lot about the criminalization of the coca plant. But what about the criminalization of indigenous communities? I mean, I was just thinking of global residences. 'Cause I did a lot of work in prisons in Hawaii.

And I'm thinkin' about how native Hawaiians and Pacific islanders and indigenous people are criminalized here in the U.S. and, you know, overrepresented in our penal systems. So-- I know you mentioned a little bit about the self reporting of indigenary. But I'm wondering if that was really underreported in Colombia? And, yeah, just if you could maybe speak a little bit about the criminalization of indigenous people.

LUCY SHERRIFF:

Who was your question directed to?

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER:

When you--

(OVERTALK)

FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER:

--had mentioned that, like, only 3% of people identify as being, you know, straight-out indigenous. I'm wondering how underreported that is and especially when you're talking about Mestizo cultures and sort of mixed race cultures in Colombia.

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

MARIA CLARA TORRES:

So my point was actually to-- to draw the contrast between the cocaine producers' countries. So I wanted to-- to-- to make the difference, to make clear the differences between, for instance, Bolivia or in Colombia, where in Bolivia there is a higher proportion of indigenous population, of people who self identifies.

I think it's-- 60% or 70%, okay? Whereas in Colombia it's 3%. This might be-- there might be an-- underestimation for sure. But I did wanted to mark that-- that there are differences. And I also wanted-- to-- to m-- to show that-- even though the-- the differences that

indigenous groups in Colombia, for instance, are involved in-- in the drug-- in drug production for-- as a commor-- as a commercial crop, all right?

So we have-- indigenous group producing cannabis, for instance-- coat-- like-- and sp-- indigenous group who have a long tradition of coca consumption, producing cannabis for the-- for the drug market. Or-- or indigenous group who-- who have-- who have a s-- and-- and a history of yage consumption. And they produce coca for the drug market.
So indigenous groups are also involved in the drug trade, okay, just as-- as Afro-Colombia as-- as Mestizos, okay? And yes-- there is-- your question about prosecution-- the prosecution-- the-- the-- wh-- according to the-- the-- the figures we have now available, it's like 255 people who are incarcerated for small-- for-- for cultivating coca, which is-- not really-- significant.

I don't really know what's the proportion. I don't-- I don't know or I don't know of-- what is the proportion of-- of indigenous people incarcerated for-- for this matter. But this is generalized, okay? So-- the production of coca-- is being done by-- by people from very diverse backgrounds, okay, including indigenous people.

LUCY SHERRIFF:

Again, I'm very aware that we're short on time. So perhaps we'll have two more questions from the audience. Take them straightaway and then answer. Yeah, the gentlemen in the blue shirt.
(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

MALE AUDIENCE MEMBER:

Hi, thank you very much. I just was curious-- there's a narrative in Peru that-- coca cultivation is from Andean farmers who are migrating to the Amazon to produce. And a lot of the-- there's a lot of resistance from indigenous tribes.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE SPEAKER:

To what?

MALE AUDIENCE MEMBER:

To coca cultivation, because it often entails their lands being occupied-- illegally. And that's titled indigenous land. And I was just curious. Is there-- are there-- are there indigenous peoples in Colombia that are actually actively resisting the cultivation of coca on their lands?

LUCY SHERRIFF:

So I think we'll take another question. And then we'll answer that one.

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

MALE AUDIENCE MEMBER:

I was curious if in the Lerma SENA model there were insights that were taken from the coca industries of Bolivia and Peru, whether the model is similar or how it diverges.

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

LUCY SHERRIFF:

So perhaps you want to answer that last question. Were insights taken from the models in Peru and Bolivia to develop the model you had in Lerma?

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

DORA'S TRANSLATOR:

The difference between the-- the question in Bolivia is that in Colombia it's-- it's-- considered a marginal-- it's marginalized, the-- the l-- l-- Lerma-- situation. But in Bolivia it's-- it-- it's allowed. It's a-- it falls under the-- what the law allows to do. But in-- but while in Lerma it's-- it's not considered-- it's marginalized, not considered fully lawful.

(FOREIGN LANGUAGE NOT TRANSCRIBED)

DORA'S TRANSLATOR:

There's a difference. Actually, there are many differences between-- the Lerma-- people-- and situation and the s-- Sierra Nevada, Santa Marta. Sierra Nevada, Santa Marta is protected under the legislation that-- that was-- that was-- as a result-- it was a result of the constitution or the ch-- changing the constitution in '91.

(FOREIGN LANGUAGE NOT TRANSCRIBED)

DORA'S TRANSLATOR:

And then-- and the-- and the other-- so they're protected under that, those legislation the-- what has-- what has happened in-- in Lerma is that we are basically taking advantage of that, what we call the gray zone. And so they have in fact-- doing some resistance-- for-- in-- in a

way. Because we-- we haven't been able to kind of go in or find that wedge to-- enter and-- and use this-- the-- the gray zone, the situation with-- of the-- no, the gray zone, the characteristics of that-- that-- this gray zone situation allows-- allowed us-- allowed us to-- to go in and-- and offer this resistance or-- start-- start this-- this project with them.

LUCY SHERRIFF:

And I think the other question was-- has there been any re-- resistance from indigenous people who found that Colombians or perhaps-- internationals are-- are moving into their lands to cultivate coca?

PAUL GOOTENBERG:

Actually-- I have learned of-- similar experiences in-- in Afri-- in-- in Afro-Colombian communities who have organized themselves to try to prevent the drug trade from coming into their communities. And these communities that have-- strong organization, that have local governance, that have a strong sense of identity-- in some cases have-- have made the opposite choice that Lerma has made, which is not to grow coca.

And I think that-- those observations, which you-- you find-- not just in indigenous communities, but-- but in Afro communities, tell you about the importance of having-- the community-- drive its own future. And so when we think about the right to-- to grown coca, I think-- linking that up to-- to communities and to community's decision about their own fate is really important. So-- in terms of indigenous communities, I don't actually have a knowledge on that. Potentially Dora or-- or Maria Clara-- do as well.

MARIA CLARA TORRES:

Well, for-- from-- from what I know-- in the north of Cauca, for instance-- it's not that they can't resist. They could totally-- well, first of all, they-- they-- they have a tradition of coca consumption. But they want-- they-- they do wanna control the-- the-- control co-- the coca— I mean, control the amount of coca that is being planted on communal lands.

It's not that they just wanna be away from coca. They-- they-- they don't wanna be close to coca. It's that coca is permitted for-- actually, for f-- as a cash crop for-- to supply the drug market. But in certain quantities, in limited quantities. And-- like, indigenous authorities-- be-- because they have strong-- organizations, grassroots organization and indigenous and-- and indigenous hierarchy and structure, they are able to control the amount of coca plants that-- are-- that are-- are on commune-- on the-- on these communal lands.

And that's to prevent the mafias, to prevent violence, to prevent-- you know, to kind of safe, to-- to protect the community. But they want-- but-- but it's a fragile balance, if you want. Because they still-- there-- they're still cultivating-- food crops.

But they need a cash crop. So they do coca. And they do cannabis. And they do coffee as well, okay, as cash crops. And it's actually very successful. In what sense? In the sense that-- they have-- they-- they-- they can control-- they can control this. But-- they are able to control this to maintain-- social control and-- to have-- to-- to-- to make a living, okay? But that's possible in those indigenous community with strong-- organization, with strong grassroots organizations. Uh-huh (AFFIRM).

LUCY SHERRIFF:

Unfortunately that's all that-- all the questions we have time for. Oh, one more apparently. Yeah. (LAUGH)

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

DIEGO GARCIA-DEVIS:

My name is Doug Willinger, blog Freedom of Medicine and Diet. I did the coca '95 panel 20 years ago at the Drug Policy Foundation. Anyway, my question is about the use of coca versus tobacco, people using coca leaf to get off tobacco. If you look at the history, the USDA banned coca.

They had the big scare campaign against coca because w-- it was being used as a tobacco habit cure. And they did it at the time the U.S. took control of the project to build the Panama Canal, which was complete in 1914, the same year as the Harrison Act.

And I can attest that coca is great for getting off of coffee. And I've had friends that have used it to reduce their consumption of cigarettes. And when you consider that coca's the safest stimulant, c-- tobacco is the most dangerous. And it's a confusion-- like, confusing powder caffeine with coffee. It's a monstrous public health fraud. They got away with it. That needs to be more stressed. My question is-- is how much is-- research is being done on the use of coca to combat the-- the tobacco plague?

LUCY SHERRIFF:

Paul, I don't know if you wanna tackle that one?

PAUL GOOTENBERG:

Well, I don't know if tackle is the word. But-- (LAUGHTER) I actually-- one thing I do wanna say-- is that-- one of the least-studied aspects of drug history in the United States is the tremendous popular and medicinal use of coca that happened in the late 19th century. And what is true is that that began to fade away mostly not with the Harrison Act, not with drug prohibition, but with the FDA acts in 1906. But coca was mainly interpreted by the

government as a gross-- adulteration of-- of drug products. And that was a historic mistake, (LAUGH) I think on many-- many, many grounds.

In the 19th century one of the most interesting-- phenomena that occurred-- proposed some of the other questions and issues that have been brought up here, is that there was a division between-- in the medical profession. The medical profession used to be much more diverse than it is today with just, you know, the reign of allopathic medicine.

Between those doctors and special British doctors and some French doctors and American doctors, who preferred coca-- and coca as-- an herbal or a tincture-- and those that-- valorized cocaine as a modern drug. And there actually were a lot of medical writings.

There needs to be more work-- about this, analyzing the superiority of coca as a cure and coca as a medicine and even coca as an nostrum. Because it obviously made you feel better-- to have coca in whatever it was you were drinking. Now to get to your specific question, I have never heard that-- theory before. (LAUGH)
(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

PAUL GOOTENBERG:

It's possible-- that there were tobacco coca cures in the late 19th century. But I've never heard that as a major explanation-- as to the drive against coca in the United States.

MALE AUDIENCE MEMBER:

In 1910 USDA publication, habit-forming agents-- look it up. Habit-forming agents, 1910, USDA.

(FOREIGN LANGUAGE NOT TRANSCRIBED)

DORA'S TRANSLATOR:

This-- those are the gaps we need to fill. The-- that's investigation that needs to still be carried out. The pro-- prohibition-- has definitely-- put-- created-- an aura or-- of wrong information-- about-- about that. There's actually in Bolivia-- person called-- portado (SIC)-- dinero (SIC)-- dinerotado (SIC), who has been-- horhortado (PH)(FOREIGN LANGUAGE) who has been-- doing studies about this.

(FOREIGN LANGUAGE NOT TRANSCRIBED)

DORA'S TRANSLATOR:

We know that there's-- in-- in-- there's in-- in the archives there's indexed or-- or studies that-- have been laying there for-- there-- we know of the existence of them. But-- my-- my-- my colleagues of-- of-- my-- the organization I work for, they've only been able to pull 45.

That means that-- the-- I-- that it's a very poor-- I would say that in terms of the up-to-date information, we don't have what we need to really start a-- investigation and-- and have-- a modern-- modern-- more modern scientific approach to-- to this topic. We haven't-- we-- out of all of indexed articles, we know that-- that there have to be more than that. We have only been able to find 45.

LUCY SHERRIFF:

Well, thank you, everyone, for coming and for the panelists as well.

VOICES:

Thank you. Thank you. (APPLAUSE)

LUCY SHERRIFF:

And I thoroughly encourage you to pick up a copy of the report, which you can get as you leave. It's available in English and Spanish.

* * *END OF TRANSCRIPT* * *