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Peru: Debate On Impact Of Drug Trade Reduction

by Barbara Khol
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During a round-table discussion in Lima on May 11 on the contents of the US-Peru anti-drug accord, drug specialists, politicians, and members of the armed forces agreed that replacing drug trade earnings of $1.5 billion per year is as important as finding crop substitutes for coca. University professor Carlos Amat asked: "Can anyone imagine stabilizing our economy without those US $1.5 billion which filter into the mainstream economy through the informal sector from the booming drug trade?" Amat, a former agriculture minister, said, "Steps against drug trafficking have to be taken without losing a grasp on reality. We cannot think only about crop substitution, we also have to think about how to substitute all that money." Sen. Felipe Osterling said, "In a sense, it is painful to admit just how dependent we actually are on those drug dollars...[H]ow do we make up for the sudden cutoff?...It is not a question of substituting one crop for another, but rather substituting the entire economic system." Former armed forces joint chief of staff Gen. Mauricio Morales pointed out that an effective crop substitution plan requires at least $2.5 billion. He said, "We have to convert a particular sector which is economically productive, but damaging to humanity into something positive, while compensating coca-growing peasants for their loss of income."

The general emphasized that the US and other consumer nations should assume some of the responsibility for peasants' loss of jobs and income, the resulting economic instability, and the ecological damage caused by drug trafficking. Morales said one way of accomplishing the above would be to ensure a stable market for coca substitutes, and to pardon a portion of the foreign debt. Peru's foreign debt is estimated at $21 billion. (Basic data from Inter Press Service, 05/11/91)

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