



# DROGAS EN MOVIMIENTO

NUEVAS PERSPECTIVAS

Un proyecto de Espolea A.C. [www.drogas-en-movimiento.org](http://www.drogas-en-movimiento.org)

## Drug policies and human rights before the IACHR

By: Luciana Pol \*

The Inter-American Commission for Human Rights (IACHR) celebrated, for the first time, on March 25 a public hearing to analyze the severe impact that drug policies have had on human rights. The hearing raised the need to review the approach of current drug policies, highlighting the need for these to put human rights and reduction of violence as its core objectives.

The space for this debate [was requested by 17 organizations from the Americas](#) that raised the need to put an end to the repressive responses in relation to drugs and to review the harmful and ineffective anti-drug policies implemented in the last fifty years. This is not the first time drug policies are discussed at international organization, but it was innovative having human rights at the center of the analysis.

The organizations reported how through their daily work in human rights have been noting several serious effects on human rights that have a common ground: its relation to drug policy. Thus, from local work with communities on the ground stricken by violence, from working in prisons with people deprived of their liberty, in the analysis of the functioning of the criminal system, through monitoring police practices on the streets and the increasing militarization of public security, all these has raised concerns and sometimes alarm in these organizations leading to a series of actions such as requesting this hearing.

At the same time, along with the social concern about drug problems, State responses are becoming increasingly repressive. From our work at [CELS](#), I argued that the war on drugs is justifying hardline security policies, creating a spiral of violence that does not stop. The incessant crescendo that exists in the use of security forces, armed forces, land and sea patrols, the use of helicopters, radars and other more sophisticated weaponry has not been effective in achieving the goal that these policies set in the beginning of reducing the supply of prohibited substances. Such repressive policies were for decades justified by appealing the need to prevent drug consumption. But we find here an amazing paradox. In our countries, those who are actually facing problems from a problematic use of drugs (both legal and illegal) are not finding a health system even willing to receive them.

Coletta Youngers, from [WOLA](#), said the 'war on drugs' has had an enormous social cost, resulting in increased rates of incarceration and disproportionate sentencing by criminalizing growers and users.

Meanwhile, Rodrigo Uprimy of [DeJusticia](#) said that drug policies must effectively include a public health and human rights approach in order to overcome the dramas lived in many of our countries. In particular, aerial spraying of coca plantations in Colombia should be suspended, since it is not effective and affects the rights of the communities living there.



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José Guevara, from the [CMDPDH](#), showed how Mexico has recently become one of the countries that has suffered the most the impacts of the 'war on drugs', reporting increased levels of violence, of extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, torture, forced displacement and the erosion of law enforcement institutions.

So fifty years after the so-called 'war on drugs' began, we notice that the consequences this system has produced are – by far – more harmful than those it intended to prevent. At the same time, such harms are unevenly distributed across the world, especially affecting those territories linked to the production or transit of drugs, most of them in Latin America. Not surprisingly, is our region which is raising the voice at an international level and that is the human rights community in the Americas, promoting a change at these international organizations.

On behalf of the 17 organizations across the region, Gastón Chillier, executive director at CELS, requested the IACHR to assume that drug policy and its consequences are a problem for human rights in the region. Therefore, specific actions must be taken, such as the realization of a report with reliable empirical data on the impact of drug policies on human rights, particularly on rural communities affected by aerial spraying and displacement, the incarceration rates, the situation of women prisoners, the disproportionality of sentences for drug crimes, persecution and criminalization of drug users, among others.

Commissioners present at the hearing inquired about possible strategies to avoid militarization of public security, on the protection of communities and regarding good practices on health issues. In turn, they agreed on the relevance of the topic to the region and the need for the Inter-American Commission to take it into consideration given its implications on the human rights agenda.

The IACHR issued a [press release](#) at the end of the 150 session, in which highlighted the realization of this hearing: *"In addition, a significant number of civil society organizations from Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, the United States, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Peru, and Uruguay requested a hearing to address an emerging issue and one that the Inter-American Commission will be following: the adverse impact of repressive anti-drug policies on the exercise of the human rights of major sectors of the population, with a disproportionate impact on children and adolescents, women, poor people, people of African descent, and campesinos, among other groups."*

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