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speech by the Transnational Radical Party delivered by Marco Perduca

Ending Coca Prohibition Should Become a Priority for UN Indigenous Forum

my speech will address the issue of production of coca leave as an economic, social and cultural activity of the indigenous peoples of the Andean region.

Over the last decade, the international community has addressed coca-related issues promoting a series of projects of "supply reduction" as well as "alternative development" to eradicate what is considered to be an "evil" plant from the face of the earth. All those efforts have proven to be unsuccessful in eliminating and/or substituting coca with other licit crops.

The TRP believes that the Permanent Forum should look into the possibility of reflecting coca-related issues in its annual report, where it submits recommendations to the ECOSOC for its distribution to relevant UN organs, funds, programs and agencies. Such an inclusion could make a substantial contribution to indigenous issues, making them become questions of concern for the world at large.

Starting to raise the issue at the 2004 session, may launch a preparatory process that could indeed include coca as an item for discussions for next year.

Many of the coca eradication programs, like the aerial fumigations, have been carried out, often through violent means, and have had a tragic impact on the health of thousands of people as well as on the environment of the concerned regions. In other eradication efforts, money has been promised to campesinos for their voluntary eradication and/or eventual substitution of coca. Despite some timid positive results, duly documented by the UN in Bolivia and Peru in the late 1990s, in the medium-long term all those anti-coca programs have miserably failed.

Different is the story of "alternative development" projects. While in theory the idea of promoting licit crops as an alternative means for the development of those societies where the plants used for the production of narcotics are grown is a good one, in practice the substitution has never proven to be fully self-sufficient in the medium or long term. In fact, once the international community pulled out of those projects, the progress achieved disappeared in a matter of months, leaving local communities without the means provided by the "artificial" international support to sustain the alternative crops and ready to go back to cultivating the illicit plant.

Furthermore, the usual alternatives to coca bush have been palm hearts and other crops in vogue at the time, products that, over the last years, have seen a surplus in the world production that has caused a drastic decrease in their profitability - annulling all the economic arguments in favour of the substitution. Lastly, when it comes to agricultural products, the tariff system imposed by North American and European countries places an unfair burden on developing nations closing rich markets to products from the "south".

With time passing, the situation in the Andes has become unbearable for local communities, the general development of their countries the well-being of the entire Latin American continent, and has provided an incredible source of easy and big money for all sorts of illegal groups, from the Narcos to terrorist as well as paramilitary networks. This dramatic situation is always addressed with the same formula: Prohibition; a formula that has not produced the desired results and needs a radical revision.

The TRP believes that the time has come for the United Nations, in the framework of its work towards the promotion of "alternative development", to carry out a feasibility study to assess the possibility to allow the development of original uses of the plants that are used to produce narcotics, starting from the coca bush. In fact, coca leaf can be used to produce medicines of different sorts, but also, as it has done for hundreds

of years, coca can be used in the production of goods such as tea, flour, toothpaste, soap, condiments, fabrics, chewing gum as well as different dietary supplements and, last but not least, the means to alleviate the abuse of the chemical substances processed from its leaves.

If the UN is really committed to improving the socio-economic quality of life of targeted populations through "sustainable development projects", the original use of these illicit plants should indeed be integrated in the programs not to prevent, reduce and eliminate the production of illicit drug crops, but to diminish the production of illicit narcotics.