

The Republic of Colombia
Positions for the Organization of American States

I. Improving Wetland Conservation and Protection

“The water from the páramos is key for the development of [Colombia],” said Felipe Rubio Torgler, a biologist and researcher for the Alexander von Humboldt Institute, a government agency that in 2007 produced the first comprehensive atlas of the Colombian páramos. Rubio said that the páramos are the most fragile ecosystem in Colombia, one of the most biologically diverse countries in the world.¹ Wetlands in Colombia and around the world help mitigate the effects of climate change, provide freshwater to their countries’ populations, and oftentimes hold important cultural value for indigenous populations. Colombia regrets the onslaught of development and urbanization beside wetland areas. The wetlands are in a war of attrition, facing the encroaching presence of pollutants and industrialized communities that cause wetlands’ inhabitants to flee or go into extinction. As urban development pushes wetlands further and further back, their water holding capacity decreases. Mining companies in particular play a huge role in this chipping away of wetland territory.

Colombia views Wetland preservation as an integral chapter in the Organization of American States’ (OAS) mission in strengthening the American continents as a whole. The Convention on Wetlands came into force for Colombia on October 18th, 1998. Currently, Colombia has 5 sites designated as Wetland of International Importance, making a total surface area of 458,525 hectares.² Outside of domestic policy, Colombia has led forums and has taken initiative on pressing measures in world decisions at the United Nations in the environmental field. Our efforts have been in spheres such as: The Commission for Sustainable Development; the negotiations on a Protocol on Biosecurity; and in inter-governmental discussions on woodlands.

One principle guiding Colombia’s position on wetland preservation is the right to development. Any and all OAS legislation should appreciate that the right to development is closely interconnected with the principle of sovereignty of other resources, especially to the use and access of genetic resources and traditional knowledge, derived from biological diversity and bio security. While infrastructural development leads to economic prosperity, oftentimes environmental concerns are circumvented in the hunt for profit. Colombia is the second most biologically diverse country in the world and thus gives the state a legitimate bargaining position.³

The Republic of Colombia approves and celebrates the works and organizations that are fighting to maintain the sanctity of one of the world’s most treasured landmarks: wetlands. We also applaud the many legitimate mining enterprises that provide jobs and an economic windfall for Colombia and many of our neighbors. However, the alarming increase in the number of illegal mining operations within many South American nations’ borders, and the steady tilting of the balance between environmental protection measures and profits requires forthright action. Colombia calls for the creation of new international methods of finding harmony between these two points. Colombia will request bipartisan concessions and urge other nations to do the same. Using IMF funds, Colombia will repurchase property near or within wetlands that has been devastated by the effects of unethical and/or illegal mining. Much like the Superfund sites in the United States, the Colombian government will be responsible for the action required to reestablish these economically vital and resource rich areas. However most of the funding will come from a tax on the mining industries, reflecting the “polluter pays principle.” Colombia encourages all countries to create conversation between wetland preservation and the interests of individual businesses, and to cultivate international cooperation in the field of sustainable development goals.

Colombia calls for the creation of new methods of combating this growing issue. Colombia proposes the creation of an entity that would reclaim wetland territory and its surrounding territory that influences its health. This entity would fulfill that mission by attempting to acquire privately-owned land near wetlands. By implementing a

¹ "Fragile Páramo Ecosystem in Colombia Threatened by Coal and Gold Rush." *Colombia: Páramos Threatened by Coal and Gold Rush*. N.p., n.d. Web.

² "Protect the Colombian Páramos and Its Freshwater!" Interamerican Association for Environmental Defense. N.p., n.d. Web.

³ "Permanent Mission of Colombia to the United Nations." *Permanent Mission of Colombia to the United Nations*. N.p., n.d. Web.

tax on mining companies that are encroaching on Ramsar-recognized wetlands, this new entity will shift the responsibility of dealing with environmental impacts from government departments to the polluters themselves.

II. Preventing Transnational Organized Crime

The dangerous implications of Transnational Organized Crime (TOC) are far reaching and deeply entrenched in the societies in which they take root. Every year, TOC is responsible for the loss of countless lives around the world and perpetuate dangerous activities such as drug and human trafficking. Because of these dangerous repercussions, TOC is an issue that has come to the forefront as a problem that must be eradicated through collaborative actions taken by the international community in partnership with Member States, NGOs, and CSOs. As home to one of the oldest guerrilla terrorist organizations, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia People's Army (FARC), and to the largest production of cocaine, the Republic of Colombia has struggled much with the battle against TOC and continues to produce national legislation and work with other Member States to eradicate this problem.

The Republic of Colombia has introduced legislation, civil initiatives, and has worked in close collaboration with NGOs in order to try to combat this growing problem. In order to combat the violence that is generally the result of TOC, Colombia introduced a national Plan for Territorial Consolidation (PTC), which builds on earlier initiatives and focuses on tackling both violence and marginalization through a coordinated approach in 2011. In addition to this, with the intention of decreasing the violence caused by the FARC, Colombia has worked in close collaboration with countries such as the United States of America (USA) who has provided \$8 billion in assistance. The Republic of Colombia has also introduced legislation that focuses on different activities by crime organizations including drug and human trafficking. In order to battle their growing drug problem, Colombia followed the USA's agenda on the "War on Drugs", which included the introduction of zero-tolerance policies. This initiative was responsible for the reduction of coca cultivation, but overall there are still gaps in the implementation of such legislation. Furthermore, in January 2013, Colombia created the Advisory Commission on Drug Policy, which involves scholars and specialists in the field. This commission is responsible for making recommendations to the Colombian government on the treatment of criminal networks and drug policy. Additionally, Colombia has introduced policies that focus on the extinction of human trafficking caused by TOC. The Republic of Colombia has created the Inter-institutional Committee to Combat Trafficking in Women and Children, which focuses on prevention, assistance, protection, training, and reintegration of victims of trafficking in persons. This committee also focuses on detection, investigation, and punishment of the offence and carries out prevention and awareness-raising campaigns around the country. In addition to programs such as this, Colombia has increased its human trafficking law enforcement efforts through its trafficking statute, Law 985, which focuses on punishments of human trafficking. Colombia has likewise worked in close collaboration with Colombian NGOs, such as the Fundacion Esperanza, which works closely with trafficking victims. The comprehensive actions that have been taken by Colombia to eliminate TOC within their state has been extensive, however there is much to be done to solve this severely deep-rooted problem. The Republic of Colombia recognizes the international collaborations that are necessary to thwart the growing issue of TOC. The Republic of Colombia has not only worked in close collaboration with countries such as the USA, Argentina, Guatemala, and Mexico, but has worked in close collaboration with NGOs and UN bodies. Colombia has ratified the UN Convention against TOC, and has been an active member within OAS in order to reduce TOC.

The Republic of Colombia and the international community has done much in order to address this pervasive problem of TOC, however upon further analysis of the issue, it is clear that there is still much to be done. The Republic of Colombia encourages the Member States to work in close collaboration with one another on developing policies, increasing funding, and sharing ideas on how to confront this problem. The Republic of Colombia also recommends that each Member State increases their funding for programs that create vocational training for those previously involved in TOC, create public awareness campaigns, and educate their citizens about the effects of TOC. Transnational Organized Crime is extensive and has deep implications for the societies in which it takes root, it is critical that the international community works together to solve this prevalent issue.