

## **Listen Up: Time for Change**

### **Latin America & the War on Drugs**

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We've seen up close how the production and trafficking of illicit drugs has fueled a war in Colombia, corrupted governments in Central America and brought terrifying [violence](#) to Mexican communities. We know about the devastating effects of drug abuse in our own neighborhoods in the United States. What has become clear is that solutions the U.S. government has pursued, such as the massive aerial spraying campaign in Colombia which destroys food as well as illicit drug crops or aid that encourages the [Mexican army](#) to police the streets and checkpoints do not solve the problem. Instead, it leads to more devastation and violence.

Too often the proposals we offer in response are considered too “soft” to be real solutions. These include: Take a public health approach to drug use in our own country, and ensure that all who seek treatment can receive it. [Work with farming communities](#) in the Andes to jointly develop gradual approaches for [alternative livelihoods](#), so they shift permanently away from illicit drug crops. Hear the [voices of farmers](#) who are trying to make these changes, and support them. [Evaluate results](#) with more honest metrics, which might tell you new approaches might be worth it. Listen to the Mexican President calling on the U.S. Congress to [enforce a ban on assault weapons](#) so that drug traffickers are not so easily equipped with deadly weapons. Listen to communities in [Juárez](#), Mexico who say that flooding the streets with soldiers has not brought peace. Focus on the slow but ultimately better route of strengthening justice systems to make them effective, fair and accountable. Listen when human rights groups warn that assistance for [intelligence services](#) or militaries in [Colombia](#) and [Mexico](#) has contributed to devastating human rights violations. Provide jobs and training to at-risk young people in Central America who might otherwise join gangs. Ensure that any counternarcotics efforts are grounded in measures to protect human and civil rights. Listen to [three former presidents](#) of Brazil, Mexico and Colombia tell us that the answer lies not in the failed strategies pursued in reducing production in their countries, but in the reduction of demand in consuming countries, through public health strategies. Yes, these may be “softer” solutions, and they undoubtedly will take patience and thought. However, we ask, what exactly is so successful about our current approach that it is not worth taking a chance?

The Obama Administration has made some incremental steps towards reducing funding for some of the very worst approaches, such as aerial spraying, and shifted resources towards better solutions, such as improving justice systems in Latin America and expanding treatment programs in the United States. However, it is not enough, as our analysis, [Waiting for Change](#), of the first period of the administration reveals. We join organizations around the world today in calling for a rethinking of the war on drugs.