

**Committee: Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)**

**Issue: Combating drug trafficking in Central and Latin America**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Over the past forty years, globalization has completely transformed the world economy. There has been a flood of ideas and technology exchanged from one part of the globe to the other, unifying the World to some extent. Yet, apart from this event of trading ideas and materials all over the world, an underground of trade filled with illegal activity also exists. In this underground, illicit industries exist that are worth billions of dollars, organized just as any regular business/company. One of these trading industries is the drug trafficking one, making over \$500 billion annually. The drug trade has now become an international business that has expanded exponentially over the past century for various reasons.

One of the major regions in which drug trafficking flourishes is Central and Latin America. Whether it is the corruption present or the perfect geographical conditions to trade drugs, Central and Latin America has become the hub of drug trafficking. Consequently, lives are lost daily and many more are endangered by this ongoing cycle. In addition, countries' economies are prevented from growing and reaching their full potential, many times resulting in poverty. All these issues are interconnected and combating drug trafficking in the region would only serve as a means of helping many of these plagued countries.

## **DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS**

### **Drug Trafficking**

According to the UNODC, drug trafficking is a global illicit trade involving the cultivation, manufacture, distribution and sale of substances, which are subject to drug prohibition laws.

## **Drug**

According to the UNODC, in the context of international drug control, "drug" is any of the substances listed in Schedule I and II of the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, whether natural or synthetic.

## **Marijuana**

According to the United States Code, the term "marijuana" refers to all parts of the plant *Cannabis sativa* L., whether growing or not.

## **Cocaine**

According to Oxford Dictionary cocaine is an addictive drug derived from cocoa or prepared synthetically, used as an illegal stimulant and sometimes medicinally as a local anesthetic. It also has the chemical formula  $C_{17}H_{12}NO_4$

## **Illegal**

According to Oxford Dictionary illegal is anything contrary to or forbidden by law, especially criminal law.

## **Poverty**

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), income poverty is when a family's income fails to meet a federally established threshold that differs across countries. Typically it is measured with respect to families and not the individual, and is adjusted for the number of people in a family. Economists often seek to identify the families whose economic position (defined as command over resources) falls below some minimally acceptance level. Similarly, the international standard of extreme poverty is set to the possession of less than 1\$ a day.

## **Gross Domestic Product per capita (GDP)**

According to the United Nations, levels of GDP per capita are obtained by dividing GDP at current market prices by the population. A variation of the indicator could be the growth in real GDP per capita, which is derived as the percentage change in real GDP divided by the population. Also as BBC puts it quite simply, if the GDP measure is up on the previous three months, the economy is growing. If it is negative it is contracting.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

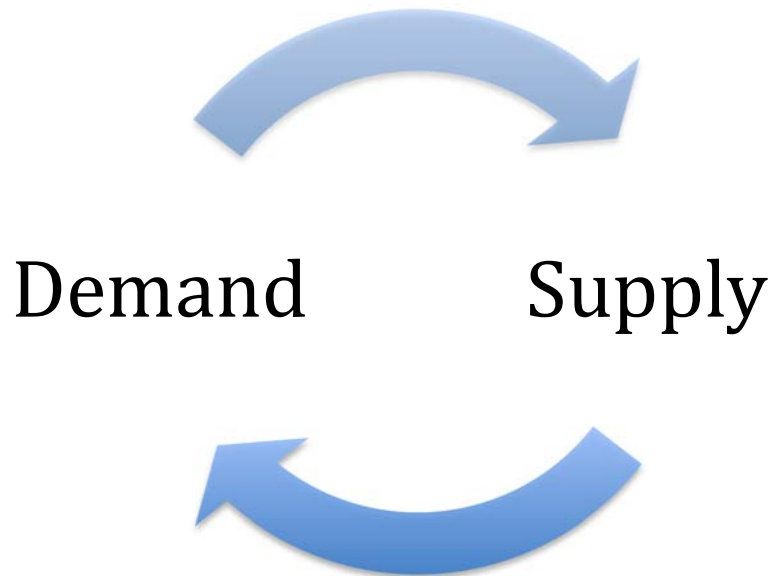
Especially in regards to the issue of drug trafficking, it is important to note that this issue stems from an everlasting demand/supply chain. Because, each of the factors that affect this chain have strong social, political and economic roots, understanding all of them will assist in understanding the complete scope of the issue.

### **The History of Drug Trafficking**

In order for drug trafficking to exist and become such a problem in today's society, drugs must first become illegal. Drug use by itself can be dated back to 5000 B.C.E. with information that the Sumerians first started using opium as a way to achieve a different state of happiness (Timeline of Events in the History of Drugs). Illegal trafficking of drugs became first present in the Opium War (1839-1842) where the British forced the Chinese to continue trading opium, regardless of the prohibition of this drug by the Chinese in 1792. Although there have been many laws throughout the course of history that prohibited drugs, it is important to note that the definition of a drug has evolved. Therefore, as the definition of this word changes, so do the laws. The prohibition of the common drugs trafficked in Central and Latin America were only established when drugs such as marijuana and cocaine became of popular demand in the 1960s. As a result, in an effort to make a profit in countries with weaker economies (Latin American countries), the illegal drug trade was fully established by 1970.

### **The Cycle of Drug Trafficking**

Drug trafficking is a chain of reactions that have deep roots established through various historical events. Drug trafficking merely comes as a result by the demand of the prohibited drug. Distributors in Latin America would not be illegally trafficking drugs such as cocaine and marijuana, if there were no demand and need for these drugs. This causes an endless demand-supply cycle that has different causes and effects, which include social, political and economic.



**Figure 1 Diagram that shows the Cycle of Demand and Supply in Drug Trafficking**

That is why for many in depressed economies such as the ones in Central and Latin America, joining this business is the easy way out of a poor life and a way to achieve a lifestyle that otherwise could never be achieved.

### **Social Aspects of the Demand**

We can see that between the 1960s-70s there was a large influx of the demand and use of drugs. For many, during that time, marijuana use became part of a lifestyle. An example of this can be the Hippie movement in the 1960's that advocated the use of marijuana for a spiritual experience. In addition to that, especially in the U.S, a migration of Mexicans and members of communities that culturally advocated drug use also resulted in an increase of demand. Today, there are still members of these communities and also people that support or look up to certain movements, which mimic these lifestyles.

There is also a major link between drugs and the music industry. Many artists today publically promote, and refer to drugs in their art. Since there are many who follow and look up to these artists, they may be "pressured" into using the drugs referred to. Since many countries promote the freedom of speech and especially in art, there is not much that can be done about this aspect of drug promotion.

Moreover, there are many social aspects that affect the use of drugs by the young population. People have reported to use drugs for reasons such as: to fit in, to escape/relax,

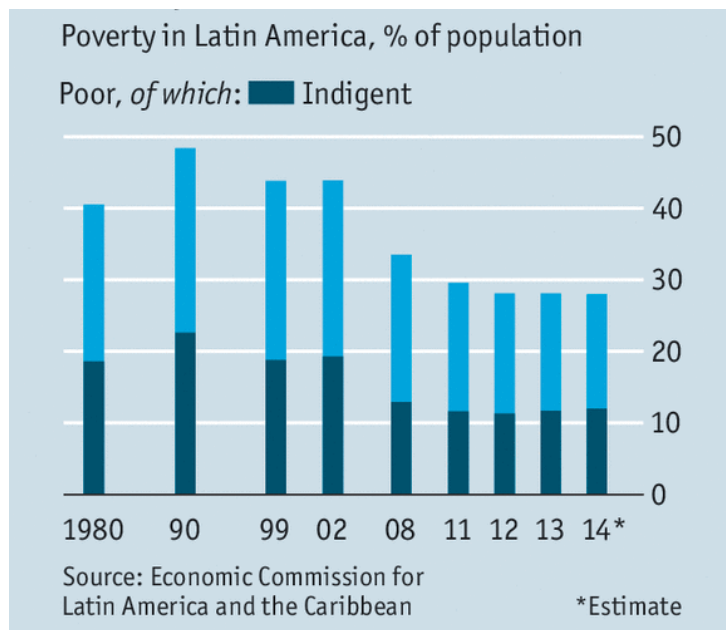
relieve boredom, to appear grown up, and to rebel/experiment. Embarking on a journey into adulthood, which for many is difficult, may justify why many young adults act “irrationally” and consume drugs.

### Governmental Aspects of the Demand

Another major problem regarding the demand of drugs is the different policies that exist all over the world, at times being different even within the same nation. This may cause confusion and lead to the illegal trafficking of drugs through a certain area, in order for the narcotic to reach its final destination for consumption. The fact that there is no universal agreement in regards to the use of drugs such as marijuana and cocaine creates confusion and does not exemplify a global unification to combat the issue of drug trafficking.

### Economic Aspects of the Supply: Poverty

When asked about the reasoning behind why people in Latin America are involved in drug trafficking, many justify their involvement with the poor economic conditions of their country. Trafficking drugs is the easy way of getting money fast, in order to support their



Economist.com

**Figure 2 Poverty Levels in Latin America**

than one occasion, that a huge gap between more and less economically capable citizens is present, especially in Latin America countries. The people that are capable many times keep

families. Poverty is a well-known issue that exists in Latin American nations which also has deep rooted causes that are very difficult to pinpoint. As we can see from the diagram, although in comparison to 2002, there has been a major decrease of poverty in Latin America, the amount of drug trafficking showcases no form of

fluctuation. Furthermore, it has been observed in more

all profits to themselves and for personal benefits, which only prevents the country's economy from expanding and developing. Hence, does not allow the poverty rate to decrease. When in 2014, 12% of the population in Latin America lives with (at times a lot) less than \$2.50/week, it is understandable why an issue such as drug trafficking exists.

The real question though is why does poverty exist? Answers vary but economists such as Taylor Schaefer have found three exact reasons to justify the poverty levels in Latin American countries, which are:

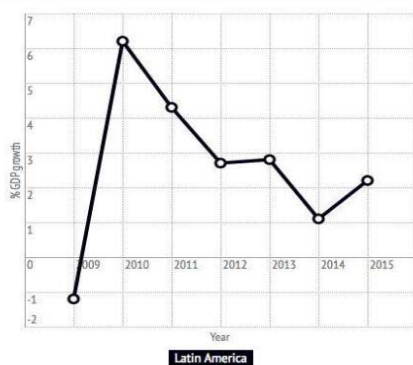
- Drug Trafficking that has "plagued the region with violence and corruption making it extremely difficult to allow for further growth and stability" (Schaefer)
- Rivalries amongst Latin American governments
- Lack of security and trust

In addition to this, if drug trafficking were to be completely abolished, that would mean that many would lose their jobs and their profits, which would have to result in the creation of more jobs by the government. A government, which may be corrupt and essentially could not handle the reforms needed in order for a new and healthy economy to be established.

### Economic Aspects of the Supply: Gross Domestic Product (GDP)

One of the greatest effects on the economy that drug trafficking has is the creation

**Latin America GDP growth**



**Figure 3 Latin America's GDP Throughout the Years**

of a large hidden economy that hinders the country's GDP. Illegal drug trafficking is not calculated in the GDP that in turn shows false indications of the country's economy. Without the true indications of the country's economy then, development and problem areas cannot be targeted. It should be noted that if drug trafficking were to be legalized/taken into account, it would only increase the country's GDP hence the economy. Growing, producing and distributing drugs could become a business that

would only help the economy, which only has positive outcomes to civilians living in poor conditions. Yet this possibility is highly unlikely, considering how destructive certain drugs have proven to one's physical and mental health.

**Political Aspects of the Supply: Corruption**

Previously mentioned in the economic aspects of the supply, were reasons (justified by economists) as to why Latin American countries suffer from poverty. The reasons listed were, drug trafficking, governmental disputes and lack of trust /national security. The reason behind these justifications is the corruption present in Latin America. Since most of the country's

wealth is shared amongst few people, bribery is very common in order for something to get done that involves the government. Especially for those who make millions of uncharted dollars from drug trafficking can very easily bribe their way through trafficking drugs. By hurting the government through corruption and essentially ruining a developed system, ruins the government's ability to reach its full potential and serve to help the people.

Corruption also stems from the weak government system that was unsatisfactory to the public servant. If the government had met their needs in the first place and was satisfactory to the workers, there would not be an issue of loyalty.

By realizing the amount of corruption that exists in many of these Latin American countries one can clearly see that drug trafficking is not only an issue with civilians but also with members of their own government.

**Social Aspects of the Supply: Communities & Lifestyles**

Just as there is a community and a certain lifestyle that affects the demand of drugs, there are communities and lifestyles built around the trafficking of drugs. Since many devote their entire lives into the trafficking of drugs, many families are built and raised around this illegal business. Later, communities built around the drug trafficking business develop a unique culture and own lifestyle, many times different to that of the average Latin American.



**Figure 4 GDP change over the years**



Along with the development of families and communities around drug trafficking, cartels and gangs are created as well. These cartels have their own rules, rankings and values, which may differ from cartel to cartel. They may have existed for decades and as time has passed they have only become better organized and hidden. The cartels have also developed their own region or territories in which they are able to traffic in.

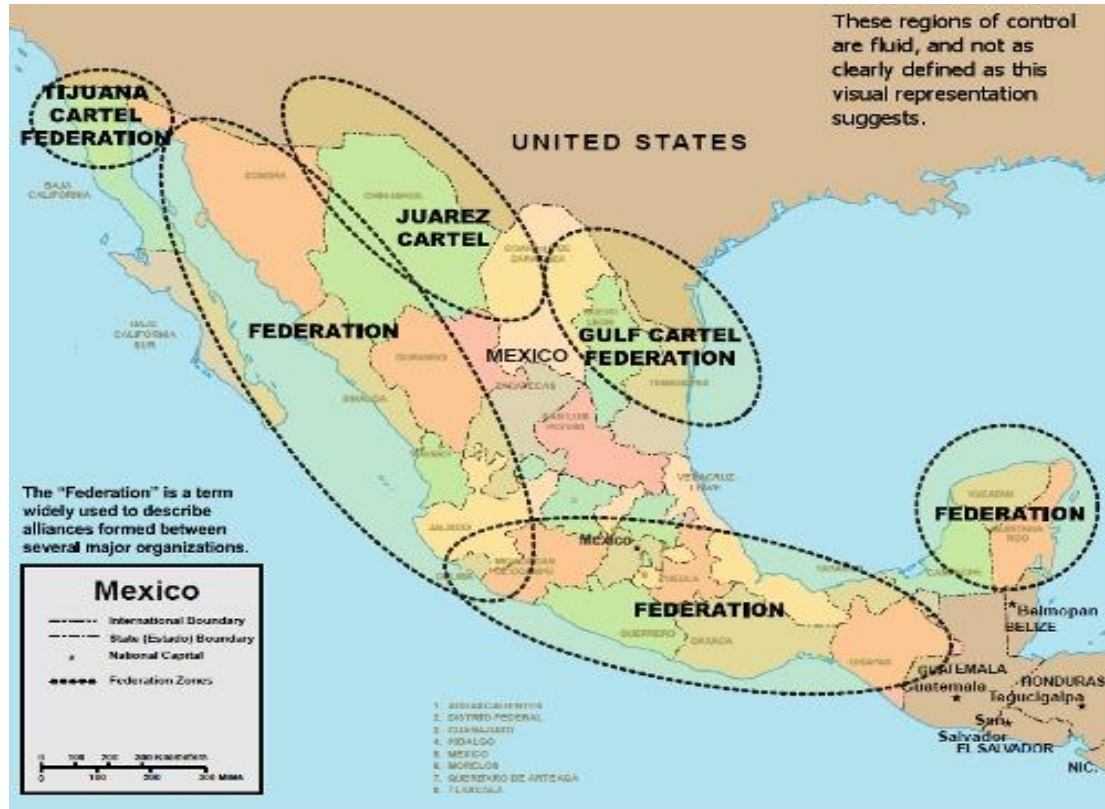


Figure 5 Cartel territories in Mexico

### Social Aspects of the Supply: Crime Rate

Just as these cartels have developed their own intricate lifestyle, communities and values, that does not mean that cartels have the same values as one another. Just as any other business, each cartel faces competition, but when dealing with illegal drug trafficking, drug cartels don't abide by the law. Disagreements and feuds between cartels cause a lot of commotion and bring many deaths, even to innocent civilians.

Feuds and rivalries caused by various reasons are not easily controlled due to the many times corrupt police force. Most commonly there is one of two scenarios. Either the police force is bribed to not interfere with the feud, or in efforts to stop the feud violent means are used which result to multiple deaths.



### Latin America: Methods Used to Traffic Drugs

Some popular methods used to traffic drugs in Central and Latin America include:

- Land trafficking (ex. Mexico-U.S. borders)
- Underground tunnels
- Submarines/ Shipping



Figure 6 Drug Trafficking Tunnel

### Environmental Aspects of the Supply

The environment in Central and Latin America plays a role in the drug trafficking that



takes place. In order for drugs such as cocaine to be produced, it needs to happen in a tropical climate, much like the one present in Latin America. Being the ideal place to grow crops like this, farmers are more prone to get involved

Figure 7 Cocaine Field

in the drug trafficking

business.

Also in many cities there are many favelas or what we would call shantytowns. These places house mostly the poor and the people that are not able to afford a proper place to live. Many of these favelas are secluded from the major cities and often times do not have proper sewage, and electricity cables. These favelas also lack proper policing which makes it an ideal place to grow drug crops such as cannabis.



Figure 8 Favelas in Rio de Janeiro



Figure 9 Marijuana Field

## MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

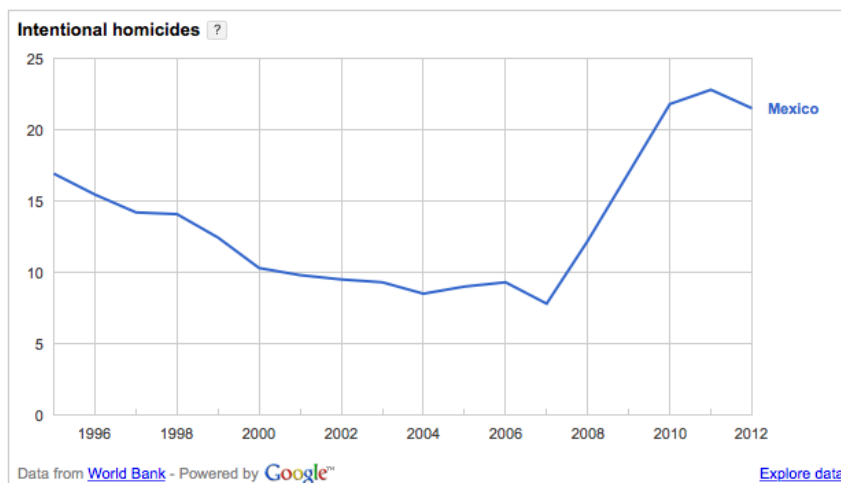
### Mexico

Mexico has been fighting the drug war since 2006 and has made active efforts into stopping drug trafficking. Even though these efforts continue, 90% of cocaine in the United States today, passes through the U.S.-Mexico border. Also, the fact that production of drugs has actually increased shows that there is still major issue with drug trafficking in Mexico.

Due to its (at times weak) judicial and police institutions, as well as its proximity to the world's largest consumer economy, Mexico has developed into the so-called 'hub' of the world's most intricate drug networks. Throughout the decades drug trafficking organizations have successfully "created a system of corruption that ensures distribution rights, market access, and even official government protection for drug traffickers in exchange for lucrative bribes." (Shirk)

Yet, it was only until the late 1980s when successful dismantling of Colombian drug cartels, that Mexican drug trafficking organizations rose to their current prominence. Mexico is one of world's largest heroin supplier to the United States as well as the largest foreign supplier of methamphetamine and marijuana.

Drug cartels over the decades have splintered, forged alliances and also continuously battled over territory. Due to these disputes amongst cartels as well as police disputes, during 2006-2012 the Human Rights Watch recorded an astounding 60,000 homicides. Some of the most distinguished drug trafficking cartels include the Zetas, Sinaloa Cartel, Juarez Cartel, Tijuana Cartel, Beltran Leyva, and the Knights Templar.



**Figure 10 Homicides in Mexico throughout the years**

## Colombia

Since the 1970's Colombia has housed the most vicious and powerful drug trafficking organizations. This started with the small cocaine smuggling that took place in the 1970's and developed into well-organized million dollar businesses. Throughout the years these drug trafficking organizations have earned enough capital that allows them to have innovative drug trafficking equipment such as high tech submarines. From small drug trafficking business selling cocaine in brief cases, it is obvious that drug trafficking organizations in Colombia have modernized and built a well-disguised million-dollar empire.

Colombia's geopolitical position also helps in the trafficking of drugs. It has access to both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, it has unmanned borders along the four other countries it borders and essentially Colombia is the gateway of South America. In addition to that having three mountain ranges across the country allows for drug trafficking organization to hide, store and move the drugs.

Acknowledging this major problem of drug trafficking in Colombia, there were several successful measures taken in order to minimize and stop the drug trafficking. This called for the dismantling of many important drug-trading organizations, which did improve Colombia's state for some time. Unfortunately this action caused a great power vacuum in Colombia, which lead to small drug trading organizations fighting over the drug power in the country. To this day although Colombia has received a lot of help from other nations such as the United States, the issue of drug trafficking still remains.

## Honduras

Being one of the poorest countries in Latin America only leads to being the region's most violent and crime-ridden nation. Holding such a title is mostly because of its strategic location in drug trafficking, acting as one of the most important transit nations. In addition to that, extreme poverty, macroeconomic changes, as well as political turmoil contribute to making Honduras the most crime-ridden nation in Latin America. Specialists estimate that about 140-300 tons of cocaine is moved through

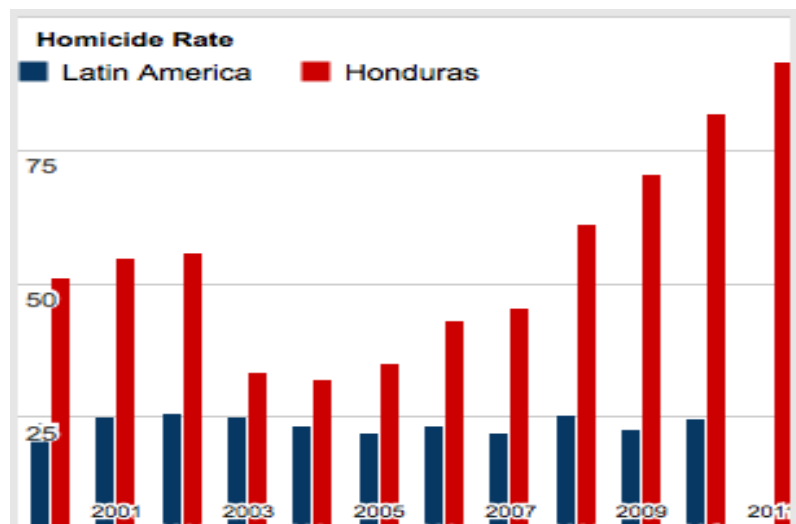
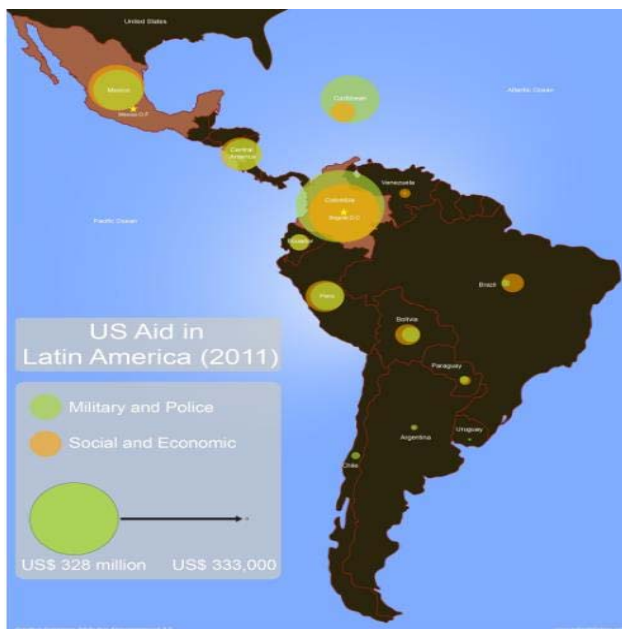


Figure 11 Homicide Rate in Honduras Compared to Latin America

Honduras annually, which only contributes to the national homicide rate. In 2009 there was a coup that shocked world opinion and has led to instability in the country. Consequently, Mexican drug cartels have expanded and strengthened their presence in Honduras, in hopes of expanding in the drug trafficking business. Colombian drug trafficking organizations first contributed to the popularity of Honduras in drug trafficking, but changing many of their routes (involving Honduras). Ever since a number of significant local groups interconnected with powerful political and economic figures, they have been able to manage the illegal activities in the country. The growth of these local groups and organizations, has led to Honduras having one of the most mistrusted and corrupt police forces in Latin America. Just as any other nation that has a major issue with drug trafficking, citizens in Honduras face threats such as extortion and kidnapping. In efforts to combat all the issues that come with drug trafficking, the Honduran government has increasingly turned to its military in order to enforce the rule of law, thing that has only resulted in raising concern for multiple human rights groups. Needless to say the judicial system in Honduras has elements such as, corruption, lack of capacity and transparency.

**United States of America (U.S.A. or U.S.)**



**Figure 12 U.S. Help in Latin America 2011**

44 years after the war on drugs was first announced by United States President Richard Nixon, the United States has taken multiple and continuous actions in stopping the drug trade that is occurring in Latin America. Statistics show that the United States spends an astounding \$51 trillion dollars annually on this drug war. The U.S. has provided Latin America with a lot of military and financial aid in this effort to combat drug trafficking. Since 2006 there has

been a large increase of border control in the U.S.-Mexico land borders. Moreover, in 1973 under President Nixon’s guidance, the United States Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) was created.

In the issue of drug trafficking in Central and Latin America, the United States plays a significant role due to the fact that it is a major demand country, which is supplied by the illegal drug trafficking in Latin America. Referencing back to the previous chart of the demand/supply cycle, the United States is a major factor that affects the demand aspect of the cycle. Therefore, just as any other Latin American country the United States has the same role to play in this endless drug trafficking cycle.

**United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)**

The United Nations office on Drugs and Crime was established in 1997 through a merger between the United Nations Drug Control Program and the Centre for International Crime Prevention. It operates in all regions of the world and relies on voluntary contributions from governments, which contribute to 90% of the budget.

UNOC is created in a way to assist Member States in the struggle against illicit drugs, crime and terrorism. In addition to that, in the Millennium Declaration UN member states resolve to intensify efforts to fight transnational crime in all its dimensions, to redouble the efforts to implement the commitment to counter the world drug problem and to take concerted action against international terrorism. The UNODC also has three different pillars.

**TIMELINE OF EVENTS**

Date	Description of Event
1915	California was one of the first states to ban the recreational use of Marijuana
August 2 <sup>nd</sup> 1937	US Marijuana Tax Acts
1946	Commission on Narcotic Drugs was created by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), which became the central drug policymaking institution in the United Nations.
1960	Use of drugs such as Marijuana become increasingly popular



1961	Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs
1972	Operation Intercept. All vehicles returning from Mexico are checked by Nixon's order. Long lines occur and, as usual no dent is made in drug traffic.  Convention on Psychotropic Substances
1973	United States Drug Enforcement Administration Created (DEA)
March 1984	Colombian Cocaine Destroyed: "Colombian government forces working in collaboration with American anti-drug officials destroy more than \$1 billion worth of cocaine in a series of raids against cocaine production facilities hidden deep in the jungles of Colombia."
1990-1999	United Nations Decade Against Drug Abuse
2006	Mexico Officially Enters the Drug War
2012	Marijuana is legalized in The Netherlands

## UN INVOLVEMENT: RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

- Strengthening interregional cooperation among the States of Latin America and the Caribbean and the States of West Africa in combating drug trafficking (Resolution 52/10) Commission on Narcotic Drugs
- Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961 as amended by the 1972 Protocol
- Convention on Psychotropic Substance of 1971
- United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988

These three major conventions complement each other and serve as drug control treaties. The purpose of the first two treaties is to "codify internationally applicable control measures in order to ensure the availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical and scientific purposes, and to prevent their diversion into illicit channels." (UNODC)

## PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

The UNODC has made multiple attempts to solve the issue of drug trafficking in Latin America. The Regional Program for Central was created and at the Ministerial Conference in Nicaragua (23 June 2009) a new program was adopted. Essentially as a way of combating drug trafficking Latin America, the hitherto applied Regional Program for Central America was used.

Another action that the UNODC took in response to illicit drug trafficking was the Santo Domingo Pact (SICA-UNODC). This pact aims to enhance “policy coordination in the field of drug trafficking and organized crime, as well as a variety of other objectives.” (UNODC) There was also an establishment of a treatment, rehabilitation and social re-integration network in Central America, which aimed to promote the needs for drug dependent people, thus covering all aspects of the issue. The UNODC has actively made multiple attempts in solving the issue, which has only helped and supported Latin American countries that are not able to solve these issues alone.

Latin American countries have tried in their own way to solve this issue by collaborating with other nations and other organizations. The United States being primarily involved and affected by this issue has also made a lot of contributions in order to combat drug trafficking in Central and Latin America.

## POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

When dealing with such an issue, many approach it in very different ways, which is one of the major reasons why this issue has not been solved to date. Each organization or proposition focuses on only one of the aspects of the issue. What is truly needed to solve this problem completely is to focus on all aspects that involve the drug trafficking. First that comes with acknowledging the ongoing cycle of demand and supply that runs the drug trafficking business. In order for a supply of drugs to exist, there must be a demand for the drugs. In this aspect of the issue, the consumer is focused on. There are three sub-categories for the issue of the drug demand: prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation, all to be targeted in a different way. There are several ways to act for each category such as public awareness, approach of the youth etc.

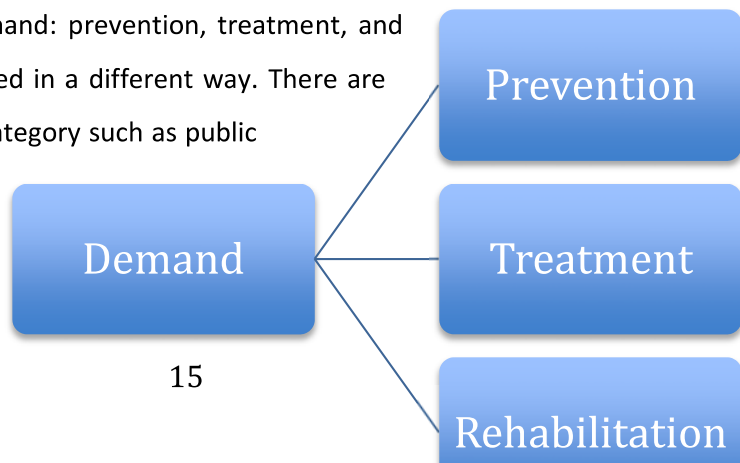


Figure 13 Visual Representation of Demand Aspects to be Targeted



Once this issue of the demand has been targeted, then there need to be ways to target the supply of drugs. One of the major questions, which should be asked, is “why is there a supply of drugs?” and “what are the factors that affect the supply of drugs?” By asking these questions and understanding the full scope of the issue, one can then find solutions for each factor that affects the supply of the drugs. In this section though it is important to note that many of the supply nations suffer from poverty and corrupt economies/governments so there is more to the issue of drug trafficking.

In order for drug trafficking to be successful it has to be transferred from one nation to another, which involves crossing borders in one way or another. Border control is a significant way of stopping a great amount of drugs from entering or leaving a country. INTERPOL, which at this point is well established and organized, can be used in order to facilitate countries incapable of offering proper border control at this point.

A different stance taken by many officials regarding the trade of drugs is the one of legalization. Many nations have decided that by making several illegal drugs such as marijuana legal would help in reducing the crime involved with drug trafficking. Although not many agree with this method, it is one to be taken into consideration as a way to completely solve this issue.

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Figure 3 <http://www.economist.com/news/americas/21644239-latin-americas-social-progress-has-stopped-what-be-done-poverty-alert>

Figure 4 <http://www.economist.com/news/americas/21599782-instead-crises-past-mediocre-growth-big-riskunless-productivity-rises-life>

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Figure 6 <http://talkingpointsmemo.com/idealab/drug-smuggling-tunnel-from-mexico-featured-electric-rail-cars-hydraulic-door-video>

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Figure 11 <http://www.insightcrime.org/honduras-organized-crime-news/honduras>

Figure 12 <http://www.insightcrime.org/colombia-organized-crime-news/colombia>

Figure 13 <http://www.un.org/ga/20special/featur/demand.htm>