



# **ALIANZA de Productores Tradicionales de la Coca Orgánica a Nivel Nacional**



---

Calle J. Molina 1138 – Cochabamba – Bolivia - Telf. 591 - 71460288

Email: cocaorganica@gmail.com

---

La Paz, November 18, 2013

To the Commissioner for Development of the European Commission  
Mr. Andris Piebalgs  
c/c the Ambassador of the European Union in Bolivia, Mr. Timothy Torlot,

Concerning: Petition for a just and decent coca policy

Dear Mr. Piebalgs,

With grief we, the undersigned coca leaders, address your High Commission to ask for your help in solving a serious problem that is presented to us, organic coca growers of the small traditional growing areas in Bolivia.

We have heard that the European Union helps to eradicate Bolivian excess coca crops and also to implement alternative crop programs. We appreciate the generosity of the Union, although we have never benefited from this assistance. Only forced eradication we have known. They say it is voluntary, and it is true, up to a cato (40x40 meters) we cultivate, respecting the law. But we are protesting because the government wants to eradicate the small traditional areas completely. A chapter here, a union there, putting obstacles at every step. Slowly and each year a little more, the government of the Chapare coca growers is destroying traditional farming areas, although they are covered by ancient customs and Law 1008 which regulates coca production.

To defend our ancestral rights to coca cultivation, on October 2 of this year, representatives of the traditional coca growers, representing 3000 families, assembled in the municipality of Apollo, where we formed the Alliance of Producers of Organic Coca in Traditional Areas. We are producers of the provinces of Carrasco and Tiraque in the Cochabamba Department, and the provinces of Franz Tamayo, Murillo and Muñecas in the Department of La Paz. Through our alliance we hoped to save our endangered coca fields, never imagining that the formation of the

alliance would be cause for the government to attack and terrorize our alliance, starting with our sister and brother growers of Apollo.

Our alliance brings together small traditional growing areas, which did not have the organization to defend their rights. This in contrast to the unions of the Chapare (where the president of the country is also president of the "Six Federations of Coca Growers of Chapare", which regroups tens of thousands of growers of the Tropics of Cochabamba), and the unions in the Yungas of the La Paz Department (ADEPCOCA), which also count tens of thousands of coca growers. We represent traditional zones lost in remote areas of our country, where our ancestors, in the Inca Empire and other civilizations before it, have always grown coca; from that time until today in the XXI century, progress has barely come to us, for lots of us have no electricity, no roads, no medical attention, no schools, etc., so the military enters with helicopters to eradicate indiscriminately our sources of survival, arguing that we work for the narcotics trade or that we are cultivating in prohibited zones of national parks .

But we cultivate coca for chewing and therefore foreigners engaging in drug trafficking don't even come to our area. Also, if it is true that some of us grow in protected areas of national parks, it is also true that we were growing in these places since before the creation of the parks, for which reason ancestral rights were respected, even during *de facto* and neo-liberal governments, who never touched our crops. The policy of eradicating traditional areas, attack, intimidate and terrorize the population, divide our union leaders and misinform the public opinion so that it will take the side of the government, this has been and is the official policy towards us since the Chapare coca growers took power in 2006.

By assaulting our sisters and brothers, that fateful day of Saturday October 19th, in the early hours of the morning - an unprecedented action, never part of an eradication operation - different uniformed forces fired at each other, which regrettably claimed the lives of four people. It were not the growers who killed, neither they who, as reported gratuitously by the government, tortured a medical officer who seems to have accompanied the attackers before he died. This misrepresentation has been used by the government to militarize the area of Apollo, not against foreign drug traffickers, an argument advanced without proof by the government, but to eradicate completely our small coca farms, and to demonstrate to the international community that it complies with the eradication of surplus coca. While the militarization lasts, women and children are continuously terrorized, while the men are hiding in the bush for fear of being mistreated by the uniformed forces or to be taken to jail. For killing they say. The only ones who killed are law enforcement officers!

We are not murderers, our hands are not stained with blood; neither are we drug dealers or coca paste producers. We respect the rule of one *cato* (40x40 meters) per family, and grow sweet coca, for human consumption. We do not grow bitter coca with agro-chemicals, like in the Chapare, whose growers even prefer to consume our sweet coca. What we protest is the eradication of our ancestral *cocales* (coca cultivation plots), the source of our support from time immemorial.

When the Americans were in Bolivia truly surplus crops of coca destined for cocaine production were being eradicated. Today, with the EU-funded development programs, and under the banner of respect for the sacred leaf, we, the coca growers of traditional areas are the ones being persecuted, probably until our total elimination by the empire of Chapare's "pharmaceutical" coca

growers. So much so that there is already talk in government circles and even in the press, that in the coming months the cultivable coca area in Bolivia will be split among the growers of the Chapare (the Tropics of Cochabamba, where 94 % of the crop goes to cocaine production, according to national press reports), and the growers of the Yungas of La Paz, without even mentioning our legally recognized traditional areas.

Finally we want to recall that the European Union has funded a study on the extent of the traditional use of coca in Bolivia, which seems to come up with much lower numbers on the area needed for consumption than those projected by the national government. The government has delayed for years the publication of this report, but it seems that the obligation to publish is motivating the government to eliminate the maximum amount of coca growing areas. Thus the growers of President Morales, reluctant to have to equally divide the necessary hectares, or to respect the ancestral rights of the traditional areas, are ready to take what legally belongs to us.

For the above exposed and in the frame of the European cooperation, we ask your high commission to:

- Intervene with the competent national authorities so that the European financial aid marked for the eradication of surplus coca crops is not diverted to the suppression of legal ancestral coca cultivations and traditional consumption
- Defend the growers of traditional areas and ensure that they are recognized by the new coca law, according to their acquired rights, and including - according to the rules stipulated in the 2013 Action Program of the European Union in favor of Bolivia - "social movements as key stakeholders to achieve the goals, and involves the organized participation of society and the facilitating of consensus"
- Demand from the national government that growers from traditional areas be treated in accordance with international law, respecting the right to organize freely their unions.

We attach a preliminary report with detailed data to support our claims to the present petition.

Because our people's fear for greater repression or attacks by the government, we will send this petition already, hoping you can immediately investigate the possibility of your help.

In the absence of our president, Gregorio Cari, union coordinator in Apollo, Franz Tamayo Province of the La Paz department, prevented because of house arrest, sign:

**Silvia Cruz Huanca**

Vice-president of the Alliance and Union Coordinator for Yungas de Vandiola-Totora of the Carrasco province, Department of Cochabamba

**Edgar Arenas**

Union secretary of the Tiraque province, Department of Cochabamba

**Pastor Chura**

Union coordinator of the Murillo province, Department of La Paz

**Alex Silva**

President of the Federation of Traditional Producers of Organic Coca of Cochabamba,

c/c

- Directorate General for Development and Cooperation – EuropAid (Directorate G. For Latin America and Caribbean)
- Commission for Development (DEBE/DCI) of the European Parliament, Ms. Eva Joly, President
- Commission for Human Rights (DROI) of the European Parliament, Ms. Barbara Lochbihler, President
- Plataforma COLI – Coca Orgánica, Libre e Informada – Cochabamba, Bolivia
- Drugs Peace Institute – Utrecht, The Netherlands