

# Meese: Cooperation is the top priority

by Dolia Estévez Pettingell

U.S. Attorney General Edwin Meese began his term by restating U.S. commitment to fight the war on drugs *with* Ibero-América and not against it. The United States will give "top priority" to developing working relations with other law-enforcement agencies in the hemisphere, Meese said on April 1. In less than a month, Meese has held discussions with the top law enforcement officers in Mexico and Colombia, and with Colombian President Belisario Betancur, to map out joint anti-drug measures.

In a press conference after meeting with Betancur on April 3, Meese called the discussions "extremely beneficial." Meese praised the Colombian government's strong anti-drug effort and pointed out that "they have even gone to the extent of destroying by dynamiting the airfields, the airstrips which are used by traffickers."

In reporting back to Colombia on his meeting with Meese April 3 in Washington, Justice Minister Enrique Parejo spoke of great steps forward in cooperation. "The United States is in favor of increasing our fleet from 10 to 30 units, but we want more to be able to also spray coca" plants, Parejo told the press April 7. Bilateral meetings between U.S. and Colombian law-enforcement officials will take place later in April.

The Colombian press reported that Colombia and the United States had agreed on a three-point plan: 1) the total eradication of all marijuana plants in Colombia, to be completed in the next three years; 2) dynamiting all clandestine airstrips in northern Colombia; 3) no weakening of the U.S.-Colombian extradition treaty.

## Working together

Meese's meeting ten days before, on March 22, with his Mexican counterpart Sergio García Ramírez, had been equally productive, and succeeded in reducing tensions between the United States and Mexico around the kidnap-murder of DEA Special Agent Enrique Camarena in Mexico last month.

"Our meeting today recognized the many positive enforcement steps we have taken together and underscored our steadfast commitment to working together to combat this common enemy," read the Meese-García joint statement.

Eradication programs, initiatives to help combat narcotics trafficking, drug-related corruption, and the murder of Camarena, were among the issues dealt with in a "cooperative spirit" during the five-hour meeting. "We have agreed to develop channels of communication for sharing information about corruption linked to drug trafficking and to take necessary actions to deal with this problem," the two officials announced.

They also agreed on a Joint Law Enforcement Summit to be held sometime this summer and to meet again in six months to review progress.

The Meese-García Ramírez meeting, characterized by both attorneys general as "positive and fruitful," was a setback for those who spread the vicious lie that the Mexican government was complicit in the murder of Camarena. Former FBI official and DEA chief Francis Mullen and other DEA spokesmen had accused the Mexican government of incompetence and corruption, bringing U.S.-Mexican diplomatic relations to their lowest level in recent years. It was not until President Reagan spoke by telephone with Mexican President Miguel de la Madrid and both agreed on the need for a meeting between Meese and García Ramírez, that tensions began to ease.

## Drug consumption immoral

Both Mexico and Colombia communicated to Meese the need to reduce drug consumption in the United States in order to assist the eradication of marijuana and coca crops in Ibero-America. A serious attack on U.S. drug consumption has been a long-standing request of Ibero-American governments, and was emphasized in Betancur's speeches.

Meese responded positively. He pointed out the need to appeal to "moral conscience" and "instituting . . . in general societal values the importance of not using, not only for health reasons, but because of what narcotics really does contribute to the breakdown of our total structure of society."

In earlier statements before the National Press Club March 21, statements blacked out in the U.S. press, Meese said: "People should know that there isn't any drug consumed for recreation purposes which isn't harmful. . . . Whoever is an assiduous client or who supports the criminal networks which traffic in drugs should know that they support those tied to terror, torture or death.

"Perhaps they believe that they are only getting pleasure for themselves, but they are also spreading misery to millions of people oppressed by the narcotics traffickers. Drug consumers in this country, by their very participation, give profits to the people who tortured and in the final account assassinated the DEA agent in Mexico. . . . They encourage the ruffians, who as we realized last year, don't think twice about enslaving literally thousands of Mexican peasants in an enormous marijuana ranch. And it gives hundreds of millions of dollars to families involved in organized crime who, among their other disagreeable businesses, traffic with pornography which abuses and mistreats thousands of our children."