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## Dateline Mexico

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# Big offensive begun against drug trade

by Josefina Menéndez

In what has been called here in Mexico the "most important civilian concentration in the fight against drug-trafficking that has been carried out to destroy marijuana and opium poppy plantations," last Aug. 12 "Operation Pacific IV" was launched to sweep through and destroy illegal drugs in the states of Sinaloa, Durango, Sonora, and Chihuahua, the zone of northern states known as the "Narcotics Growing Triangle."

José Maria Ortega Padilla, general supervisor of the Technical and Criminal Division of the Mexican Attorney General's office, remarked that in no part of the world, not even the United States, has so much personnel and equipment ever been put together for an anti-drug campaign—more than 6,000 army troops and some 500 agents of the Judicial Police took part. Ortega is also director of Mexico's permanent overall anti-drug campaign.

"Where we must attack, we will do so energetically," stressed Ortega to the national and international press assembled in Badiracuato, Sinaloa, at the invitation of the attorney general's office. Badiracuato is considered to be the capital of Mexican drug-trafficking, and was chosen by Ortega for his press conference to make the point that drug-trafficking in Mexico "is not out of control."

As if to prove it, in the first week of Operation Pacific IV, nearly 300 poppy fields and over one thousand fields of marijuana have been destroyed. In the course of the 45 days the operation is expected to last, its forces "will destroy thousands of crops," said Ortega, who also pointed out that some of these crops have "as many as 50 to 60 hectares of land under cultivation, including some with modern irrigation systems." It is estimated that the total dollar value of the narcotics to be destroyed in the course of this campaign is equivalent to the total amount of Mexico's foreign debt.

The attorney general's office deployed a staff of 410 for this operation, including 60 agents of Mexico's Federal Police. They also will have the use of three Twin Otter airplanes for personnel transport; 12 Bell 212 helicopters to mobilize police and national army personnel; 32 Bell 206 helicopters for fumigation; and 20 Cessna 206 aircraft outfitted for locating and identifying the illegal crops.

General Carlos Rosas Pedrote, commander of the Ninth Military Zone in the state of Sinaloa and coordinator of the Third Military Zone, which encompasses Sonora, Chihuahua, Durango, and Sinaloa, stated that in this military region, 8 generals, 79 chiefs, 298 officials, and 6,500 troops are deployed in the battle against drug-trafficking.

Furthermore, the spokesman for the attorney general announced that an agent of the attorney general's office, 7 regional coordinators, 6 maintenance supervisors, 15 inspectors, 11 radio operators, 68 pilots, 60 agents, 68 navigators, 106 logistical support troops, and 68 mechanics were deployed in the anti-drug action zones.

### U.S.-Mexican war on drugs

This new, redoubled offensive against drug-trafficking was announced in tandem with the visit of U.S. Attorney General Edwin Meese, who was in Mexico from Aug. 12-14. One of the primary results of the visit was the fact both Meese and his Mexican counterpart, Attorney General Sergio García Ramírez made clear that the war on drugs will not be isolated.

García Ramírez recognized that the link to the United States in the fight against drug-trafficking is now closer than ever, but ties are also very close with Peru, Colombia, Venezuela, and Bolivia, where he personally traveled to meet with the Presidents and attorneys-general to plan joint offensives. García Ramírez himself charged that under the cover of phony organizations or disguised as legitimate businesses, the drug smugglers practice a kind of criminality which is different from the traditional kind, but which nonetheless endangers the health and peace of society.

He signaled the alert on the new escalation of international drug-trafficking which "wants to increase zones of cultivation or transshipment in Mexico" and indicated that to counter "the criminality which looks toward the north," the attorney general's office has established, more than pacts or accords, "worthwhile and effective mechanisms of understanding and collaboration."

The end result of the visit of the U.S. attorney general was one more step toward improving the bilateral relations between both countries, as was stated by Mexico's Foreign Minister Bernardo Sepúlveda, who remarked that since the visit of Attorney General Meese, the situation has changed, since the latter "tried to transmit a genuine desire for cooperation in eliminating the irritating language or tone in the treatment of this question." Previously, Sepúlveda noted, there had been unnecessary curtness and rudeness in some expressions of U.S. officials, on the form in which Mexico has gone after drug-trafficking.

In the end, what remains to be seen is whether Mexico and the United States itself, will do what the President of Peru is doing: go after the citizens who are apparently "above suspicion."