

Colombia: Gustavo Petro calls for climate action, end to 'failed' war on drugs at UN assembly

Ana Zorita, October 18, 2022

Issue 1365 // Colombia

Colombian President Gustavo Petro denounced the climate inaction by the world's ruling classes and called for an end to the war on drugs in his impassioned [speech \(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rFIBYotDoSg&ab_channel=UnitedNations\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rFIBYotDoSg&ab_channel=UnitedNations) to the United Nations general assembly on September 20.

Petro [won the presidential elections \(https://www.greenleft.org.au/content/colombia-gustavo-petros-victory-latest-affront-us-imperialism-latin-america\)](https://www.greenleft.org.au/content/colombia-gustavo-petros-victory-latest-affront-us-imperialism-latin-america) in June, becoming Colombia's first leftist president.

He opened his speech by highlighting the hypocrisy of supporters of the so-called "war on drugs", which has resulted in millions of deaths. "You are only interested in my country to throw poisons into its jungles, take its men to prison and throw its women into exclusion," Petro said. "You are not interested in the education of children, but in killing their forests and extracting coal and oil from their entrails."

Petro said poor farmers have been "demonised" in the war on drugs. Last month, his government started redistributing land to indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, marking one of the first steps in his promised agrarian reform. Weeks later, on October 8, the government [signed \(https://peoplesdispatch.org/2022/10/11/colombian-government-makes-historic-advance-towards-agrarian-reform-and-peace/\)](https://peoplesdispatch.org/2022/10/11/colombian-government-makes-historic-advance-towards-agrarian-reform-and-peace/) an agreement to buy 3 million hectares of land to redistribute to campesinos and those without land.

See also

[Colombia: Gustavo Petro's victory the latest affront to US imperialism in Latin America \(https://www.greenleft.org.au/content/colombia-gustavo-petros-victory-latest-affront-us-imperialism-latin-america\)](https://www.greenleft.org.au/content/colombia-gustavo-petros-victory-latest-affront-us-imperialism-latin-america)

[Colombia: Petro vows to tackle violence, illegal mining \(https://www.greenleft.org.au/content/colombia-petro-vows-tackle-violence-illegal-mining\)](https://www.greenleft.org.au/content/colombia-petro-vows-tackle-violence-illegal-mining)

Petro pointed out the hypocrisy of those who defend the war on drugs as necessary to "save lives", while allowing destructive fossil fuel extraction.

“The dictates of power have ordered that cocaine is the poison and must be persecuted, even if it only causes minimal deaths by overdose,” he said, “but coal and oil must be protected, even if their use could extinguish the whole of humanity”.

The 40-year-long war on drugs, if continued, will mean further violence in Colombia and continued racist mass incarceration in the United States, Petro said. “It will see millions of African-Americans imprisoned in its private prisons. The African-American prisoner will become the business of prison companies, a million more Latin Americans will be murdered, our waters and our green fields will be filled with blood...”

Petro demanded an end to the “failed” and “irrational” approach.

“Reducing drug consumption does not require wars,” he said. “It requires all of us to build a better society: a society with more solidarity, more affection, where the intensity of life saves from addictions and new forms of slavery.”

Petro condemned the decades of climate inaction by the capitalist ruling classes, who instead chose to fuel climate catastrophe through imperialist wars. “When it was necessary to move away from coal and oil as soon as possible, they invented war after war after war,” he said. “They invaded Ukraine, but also Iraq, Libya and Syria. They invaded in the name of oil and gas.”

Petro declared that “the cause of the climate disaster is capital ... the expanded accumulation of capital is an expanded accumulation of death”.

Previously, Petro has pledged to start phasing out Colombia’s oil and gas production, including a [moratorium](https://www.climatechangenews.com/2022/06/20/colombias-new-president-gustavo-petro-pledges-to-keep-fossil-fuels-in-the-ground/) (<https://www.climatechangenews.com/2022/06/20/colombias-new-president-gustavo-petro-pledges-to-keep-fossil-fuels-in-the-ground/>) on new licences for hydrocarbon exploration.

He highlighted the cruel treatment of refugees, often by the same governments that fuel refugee crises through war. “You see starving and thirsty people emigrating by the millions to the north ... you enclose them, build walls, shoot at them.

“You expel them as if they were not human beings, you demonstrate fivefold the mentality of those who created the gas chambers and the concentration camps, you replicate 1933 but on a planetary scale.”

Petro denounced the profiteering from life-saving treatments: “The climate disaster fills us with viruses that swarm over us, but you do business with medicines and turn vaccines into commodities.”

Company reports [revealed](https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/pfizer-biontech-and-moderna-making-1000-profit-every-second-while-worlds-poorest) (<https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/pfizer-biontech-and-moderna-making-1000-profit-every-second-while-worlds-poorest>) that pharmaceutical giants Pfizer,

BioNTech and Moderna made combined profits of US\$35.8 billion last year — about \$65,000 every minute.

Thank you for printing this article. Green Left Weekly relies on the support of readers like you. Visit greenleft.org.au/support and become a Green Left supporter today.