



## 2011 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR)

Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs

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### Argentina

#### Volume I: Drugs & Chemical Control

##### I. Summary

##### Argentina

##### A. Introduction

While not a significant narcotics producing country, Argentina continues to be an important transit country for Andean-produced cocaine. The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) estimates as much as 70 metric tons of cocaine transited Argentina in 2010, mostly destined for Europe. Argentine officials believe there is increased transit of cocaine through Argentina and credit this to successful counternarcotics efforts in Mexico and Colombia which are forcing drug traffickers to utilize other routes to market. Diminished drug interdiction capabilities in Bolivia also contribute significantly.

Marijuana, the majority of which is imported from Paraguay and used for domestic consumption, continues to be the most widely abused drug in Argentina. However, the prevalence of cocaine use has risen sharply and the country has the second largest internal cocaine market in South America after Brazil. Cocaine remains by far the leading drug for which Argentines seek help at treatment centers and the use of cocaine base among economically disadvantaged members of society continues. The Government of Argentina (GOA) has taken steps, including new studies and educational and treatment initiatives, to reduce demand.

Argentina regulates the production, importation and transportation of precursor chemicals. Argentine law enforcement agencies impound unregistered precursor chemicals and violators are punished, generally through fines and revocation of importation and/or transport permits. In the case of ephedrine, these efforts have been successful although the country remains a regional source for precursor chemicals used for cocaine production.

Argentina is a party to the 1988 UN Drug Convention.

##### B. Drug Control Accomplishments, Policies, and Trends

##### 1. Institutional Development

Argentina's National Counternarcotics Plan for 2009 - 2011 continues to be coordinated by the Secretariat of Planning for the Prevention of Drug Addiction and Drug Trafficking (SEDRONAR). SEDRONAR's efforts are complemented by the National Coordinating Commission for Public Policy Regarding Prevention and Control of Illicit

Drug Trafficking, International Organized Crime, and Corruption which is charged with an advisory, not enforcement, role in Argentina's counter-drug strategy. The Commission is under the authority of the Chief of Cabinet and is composed of leading jurists and both natural and social scientists who had participated in a 2008 - 2009 Scientific Assessment Committee focused on narcotics issues. While many of the Commission's initiatives in 2010 targeted efforts to deal with prevention and treatment of addiction, it is also developing strategies for enhancing coordination among national and provincial law enforcement agencies; proposing mechanisms to detect suspicious patterns in the trade of precursor chemicals; strengthening draft GOA anti-money laundering laws; and launching an effort to prepare a "Criminal Map on Drugs" to show trade, distribution, stock, and traffic of illegal drugs in Argentina. Unfortunately, insufficient cooperation among the various federal and provincial law enforcement agencies hampers Argentina's effectiveness in combating the illegal drug trade. Prosecution of traffickers is likewise complicated by backlogs in the judicial system. Among the reasons for these backlogs is the still incomplete move from an inquisitorial system to an oral accusatorial system at the national level.

Argentine law enforcement and security agencies, including the Federal Police (PFA), the Frontier Guard known as the Gendarmeria or GNA, the Special Airport Police (PSA), the Coast Guard (Prefectura or PNA), and provincial security forces enhanced their efforts in 2010 to apply additional resources, including expanding radar coverage in the north, to address what the government views as an increasing push by drug traffickers to utilize the country's northern borders for illicit trade.

Despite the Supreme Court's 2009 ruling against imposing criminal penalties for the personal possession of small amounts of marijuana, Argentina's Narcotics Law 23.737 has not been modified. In fact, an October 2010 Federal Court decision refused to apply the 2009 precedent in the case of two youths who were arrested for smoking marijuana in a public park. The court distinguished the case by noting the 2009 ruling applied exclusively to "private use" of marijuana. Nonetheless, some GOA officials have advocated legislation to decriminalize personal possession of small quantities of marijuana, arguing that such a measure would permit the shifting of scarce police and judicial resources away from individual users and toward drug trafficking organizations, as well as free up funds for substance abuse treatment. Congress has not acted on the proposal.

Argentina is a party to the 1988 UN Drug Convention; the 1961 UN Single Convention as amended by the 1972 Protocol; the 1971 UN Convention on Psychotropic Substances; the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its three Protocols; and the UN Convention against Corruption. The United States and Argentina are parties to an extradition treaty and a mutual legal assistance treaty. Argentina has bilateral narcotics cooperation agreements with many neighboring countries, as well as with Mexico and Spain. In addition, Spain, the United Kingdom, Germany, Australia, France, Italy and the Netherlands provide limited counternarcotics training and equipment to the GOA. Argentina is also a party to the Inter-American Convention against Corruption, Inter-American Convention of Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters, the Inter-American Convention against Trafficking in Illegal Firearms, and the Inter-American Convention against Terrorism, among others.

## **2. Supply Reduction**

SEDRONAR maintains centralized records of drugs seized by both federal and provincial security forces in Argentina. It is GOA policy to make this data public only after it has been turned over to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Official 2010 seizure data is expected in March 2011. Pending official numbers, preliminary USG estimates indicate Argentine security forces seized approximately 12.7 metric tons (MT) of cocaine from January through September 2010. This nine month total represents an increase over the 12.56 MT of cocaine seized by the GOA in 2009.

While the vast majority of Andean cocaine transiting Argentina has always been smuggled across the Bolivian-Argentine border, diminished drug interdiction capabilities in Bolivia have contributed to increased flows. Cocaine transiting Argentina is primarily destined for international markets in Europe, in particular Spain; however

SEDRONAR reported in 2010, that cocaine transiting Argentina is now reaching markets in South Africa, Israel, and Australia.

Maritime container-based smuggling appears to have increased in 2010. Between June and August 2010, 5.83 MT of cocaine was seized in Argentine-origin containers, most of which were destined for Spain. All of the containerized shipments involved cover loads of legitimate cargo ranging from fresh produce to household furniture. Traffickers are also increasing their use of light aircraft to bring cocaine and marijuana into Argentina across the borders with Bolivia and Paraguay.

The USG further estimates that Argentine security forces seized over 66 MT of marijuana from January through September 2010, representing a potential decrease from the estimated 91.87 MT seized during calendar year 2009. Most of the marijuana was seized either in the tri-border region with Brazil and Paraguay, or along Argentina's western border with Chile.

SEDRONAR reported the Special Airport Police seized 1.5 kilograms of heroin in 2010 and that provincial security forces seized 93,500 units of ecstasy and 84.5 liters of ether between January and July 2010. The Gendarmeria seized 1.07 MT of precursor chemicals from January through September 2010 while the Federal Police reported seizing 3.62 MT of precursor chemicals during the same period. The Coast Guard reported seizing 16,200 liters of ether and 34 liters of hydrochloric acid from January through August 2010.

### **3. Drug Abuse Awareness, Demand Reduction, and Treatment**

According to the 2010 UNODC World Drug Report, Argentina had the highest prevalence of cocaine use (2.7 percent) and marijuana use (7.2 percent) in South America among 15 to 64 year-olds. This translates into the second largest number of cocaine users in the region (600,000), second only to Brazil. In addition, abuse of a by-product of the base-to-hydrochloride cocaine conversion process, known locally as "pasta base" or "paco," is increasing. Pasta base is readily available on the streets, costs approximately 25 US cents a "hit" and produces a brief, intense high when smoked in pipes or mixed with tobacco. Argentine law enforcement officials and local press report that a rise in street crime has been fueled by a corresponding increase in pasta base consumption.

The GOA, in collaboration with private sector entities, sponsors a variety of print and broadcast information campaigns which have a nationwide reach. Although SEDRONAR continues to play the leading role in coordinating GOA demand reduction efforts, the National Coordinating Commission has sponsored several initiatives in 2010, including a scientific analysis of pasta base to better publicize its overall toxicity, as well as a set of guidelines designed to ensure drug addiction treatment programs comply with both domestic law and international obligations.

Drug treatment protocols/techniques are similar to those found in the United States and Europe. Prevention budgets are managed via four focus areas -- the family, schools, the community (with funding from the World Bank), and the work place.

### **4. Corruption**

As a matter of policy, the Government of Argentina does not encourage or facilitate illicit production or distribution of narcotics, psychotropic drugs, or other controlled substances, or the laundering of proceeds from illegal drug transactions, and there is no evidence to suggest senior government officials are engaged in such activity. An independent judiciary and an investigative press actively pursue allegations of corrupt practices involving government authorities.

### **C. National Goals, Bilateral Cooperation, and U.S. Policy Initiatives**

Argentina cooperated effectively with the United States, European, and other South American partners in narcotics investigations and regularly participated in U.S.-sponsored training in 2010. U.S. efforts in Argentina focus on four core areas: reducing Argentina's role as a transit point for drug trafficking by disrupting and dismantling the major drug trafficking organizations in the region; promoting regional counternarcotics cooperation among Andean and Southern Cone nations; maximizing host nation drug enforcement capabilities; and fortifying bilateral cooperation with host nation law enforcement agencies.

Key elements of U.S.-Argentine cooperation are the Northern Border Task Force (NBTF), a joint law enforcement group comprising federal and provincial elements which operates along the Bolivian border, and the Eastern Border Task Force (EBTF), which acts against illicit drug smuggling activities in the tri-border area with Paraguay and Brazil. Both the NBTF and EBTF utilize USG support and have proven successful in interdicting cross-border cocaine and marijuana shipments.

In addition, Argentine authorities actively coordinate counternarcotics activities with neighboring countries. The U.S. Government has facilitated this cooperation by supporting joint training and seminars in the region and providing software and equipment for the sharing of real-time drug investigation leads.

#### **D. Conclusion**

Argentina has worked to address all aspects of the drug control effort and has focused an increasing level of attention on demand reduction and treatment initiatives in 2010. In recognition of the increase in cocaine shipments in containerized cargo, the GOA should focus its interdiction efforts on targeted investigations supported by increased personnel levels and enhanced use of technology, such as x-ray scanning equipment, in order to reduce the amount of drug traffic escaping detection. Likewise, the GOA should implement its plan to improve its ability to detect and interdict illicit shipments crossing its northern borders with Bolivia and Paraguay by investing in additional personnel and other resources. In addition, optimizing cooperation among the various federal and provincial law enforcement entities would enhance Argentina's effectiveness in combating the illegal drug trade. It would be particularly useful to further improve judicial case processing efficiency as prosecutions have been slowed by the still incomplete transition to an accusatorial system.