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## Embassy of the United States of America Public Affairs Section

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### **Over One Hundred Officers Graduate from *Garras del Valor* International Training Center**

The *Garras del Valor* International Counternarcotics Training Center graduated 85 police officers who completed the men's International Advanced Course while 24 new paramedics completed the basic international co-ed course for combat paramedics. Of the 109 graduates, 15 are officers from Paraguay, Ecuador, Colombia, and Peru.

During the graduation ceremony, U.S. Embassy Charge d'Affaires Larry Memmott highlighted the training level at the center and the dedication and skills of the graduating students. "The school is top-notch, offering specialized training for counternarcotics police officers who are the backbone of the Special Force for the Fight Against Narcotics Trafficking (FELCN) in Bolivia. We recognize that the counterdrug battle is not easy, and that it is a shared responsibility," said Memmott.

The *Garras del Valor* International Counternarcotics Training Center was established in 1987, training an average of 640 Bolivians and international police officers every year. It is one of the best counternarcotics training centers in the region and its graduates are recognized in their countries for having completed the course. The center also offers specialized courses for prosecutors, journalists, and doctors, and conducts programs for antidrug and other units of the Bolivian police.

Mr. Memmott noted that the U.S. Government provides \$500,000 for the operation of the center every year. "In furtherance of the policy of the Government of the Plurinational State of Bolivia to nationalize the fight against drugs, and in the spirit of mutual respect, our counternarcotics cooperation is shifting from direct operational support to a new focus on specialized training and capacity building of Bolivia's counternarcotics' units. Our continued support for the *Garras* school fits with our new emphasis even better than it did with the old. The U.S. remains committed to the counternarcotics battle. Over the past year, we have spent well over USD 5 million in this fight."

The Chargé added that U.S. cooperation includes the transfer and donation of equipment and other assets to the government of Bolivia to be used in counternarcotics purposes. "Within the next few months, we expect to transfer our air wing unit – including eight helicopters, three C-130s and one other fixed-wing aircraft - to the Plurinational State of Bolivia in support of the nationalization of its counternarcotics program. We also recognize that equipment is only as effective as the people using it. That is why our new emphasis on capacity building is so important to the fight against narcotics."

Memmott said that sustained effort in the U.S. has resulted in a 30% reduction in cocaine use over the past ten years. Overall, illegal drug use in the U.S. has fallen by 40% since its peak in the 1970s. "In Bolivia, the sustained effort against narcotics trafficking by the governments of Bolivia and the U.S. have kept at bay the narcoterrorism and horrendous gang and organized crime violence that has affected other countries. Our efforts have been and will continue to be rewarded with success."