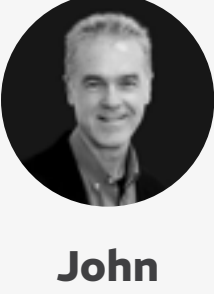


Remarks of John Walsh Director for Drug Policy and the Andes, OAS/CICAD Seventy-Eighth Regular Session

Latin America, United States

Drug Policy



John Walsh

OAS/CICAD Seventy-Eighth Regular Session Washington, D.C. Sixth Plenary Session

December 18, 2025

On September 2, President Trump ordered the U.S. military to destroy a boat in the Caribbean that was alleged to be smuggling illicit drugs.

Multiple attacks on that boat eventually killed all 11 people on board.

The legality of those strikes are now the subject of intense concern in the U.S. Congress.

As of today, the U.S. military has carried out 26 attacks against so-called “drug boats” in the Caribbean and the Eastern Pacific, resulting in 99 deaths.

The Trump administration has sought to justify these killings by arguing that the United States is engaged in a non-international armed conflict.

But in reality, the United States is not at war.

So the laws of peacetime prevail—that is, International Human Rights Law.

The killings being carried out by U.S. forces are extrajudicial executions.

Or in plainer language, murders.

None of the 99 people killed thus far were lawful military targets, and their premeditated killings should be considered crimes.

Drug smuggling, the alleged activity, is not a capital offense under U.S. or international law.

The death penalty is not in order, even with due process. Much less summary execution, as the U.S. is carrying out.

In the words of UN human rights chief Volcker Turk:

“These attacks—and their mounting human cost—are unacceptable. The U.S. must halt such attacks and take all measures necessary to prevent the extrajudicial killing of people aboard these boats, whatever the criminal conduct alleged against them.”

On December 10, Human Rights Day, the International Narcotics Control Board made it crystal clear:

“Extra-judicial responses to any alleged drug-related activities are in violation of the drug control conventions and fundamental human rights, which require that alleged drug-related crimes be addressed through formal procedures adhering to due process.”

Close U.S. allies such as the United Kingdom and France have taken notice and are reportedly restricting intelligence sharing that could implicate their governments and their personnel in illegal U.S. conduct.

Other governments with long histories of close collaboration with the United States on maritime drug interdiction are also quietly distancing themselves from these U.S. attacks.

The U.S. authorities ordering these attacks on alleged drug smugglers may believe that they will remain immune from accountability for their conduct.

That may be what Rodrigo Duterte believed as he presided over a drug-war killing spree as president of the Philippines.

But Duterte is now in custody of the International Criminal Court, facing charges of crimes against humanity.

Whatever the future may bring, the call today must be loud and clear: these unlawful killings must stop and those responsible for ordering them must face justice.

John Walsh, Director of Drug Policy WOLA

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