

Chile Harvests First Crop of Medicinal Marijuana



Santiago de Chile, April 10 (teleSUR-RHC) Chile has started harvesting its first medical marijuana crop on Tuesday, while the drug remains prohibited for its recreational consumption.

The 400 plants were sown in October in a heavily guarded field of about 100 square meters in the residential district of *La Florida*, in *Santiago de Chile*.

The non-profit organization *Daya* Foundation was then granted a permit to extract cannabis oil in a pilot program aimed at treating 200 cancer patients for free. "This is about the dignity of patients who are dying every day in pain and with very expensive medical bills," said Rodolfo Carter, the mayor of *La Florida*, at a ceremony marking the harvest.

The cannabis leaves will now be processed in a laboratory, as the final product is expected to be ready by January 2016.

Chile has become the first country of the region (and of the world) to legally harvest cannabis plants, while in Uruguay — the only country of the world that has legalized its recreational consumption and sale, producers are still awaiting state's green light.

The Colombian Congress is also examining a legislation allowing the medicinal use of marijuana, in a context where more and more scientific studies tend to prove the benefits of the plant for severe medical conditions like epilepsy.

A couple of months ago the *Daya* project, the Chilean authorities also granted a woman suffering from lupus and breast cancer the first authorization to import cannabis-derived drugs, after months of lobbying.

Cecilia Heyder explained AFP that before the permit, she has been arrested several times for using marijuana to ease her pain. "I'm not a criminal or a drug dealer. I didn't ask to get sick," she claimed.

She praised the *Daya* project, highlighting how much using the drug changed her life: "I don't have to use a wheelchair anymore. It changed my quality of life. I'm not going to get better, but I'm not in pain."

The Chilean Congress is currently discussing a bill meant to remove marijuana from the list of hard drugs, then only categorized as a "soft drug" — yet prohibiting its use in public and the possession of more than 10 grams.

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