

COLOMBIA



COLOMBIAN MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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STATEMENT BY

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President of the Republic of Colombia

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Mr. President,

Allow me to congratulate you for your election as President of the General Assembly and to wish you the greatest success in your work.

After five years in Office, we come to the United Nations General Assembly, once again, to inform on crucial issues for Colombian democracy.

We have rejected the dismantling of the State and we refuse to enter into statism that withers private initiative. We have reformed 420 state entities and we are determined to work in that direction until the last day of our government. We seek a more efficient State at the service of the community and not owned by political deals, union excesses or interest groups.

We are committed to the development of an entrepreneurial society, in opposition to state or private monopolies, in a Nation with a consensus around productivity, discipline and equity.

We provide all the space for private initiative with social responsibility, which must be expressed in the transparency of the relations between investors and the State, in entrepreneurial solidarity with the community, beyond the legal minimums, and in labour relations framed by fraternity, contrary to savage capitalism and class struggle.

In sectors such as electric, metallurgical and health, we have encouraged participatory trade unionism, with simultaneous responsibility in the social field and the entrepreneurial management, different from the traditional entitlement organization.

We have increased by 40% the affiliation of workers to social security, due to the better performance of the economy and our fight against evasion. In the last five years, the minimum wage has grown by 8% above inflation.

Our per capita income has gone from U\$1,851 to U\$3,517 dollars. In making the adjustment in terms of purchasing power, it has increased from U\$6,468 to U\$9,456 dollars. For the first time, in decades, the Gini coefficient of income distribution is starting to improve.

Since the first day of my government, with our Democratic Security Policy, we made the decision not to tolerate the murder of any Colombian and to defeat impunity.

The security situation has improved substantially. In 2002, Colombia suffered 29,000 homicides, of which 196 were trade unionists, and we closed 2006 with a 40% reduction in general violence and 70% in violence against trade unionists.

This year there are 6,714 Colombians with individual protection by the State, of which almost 1,200 are workers belonging to trade unions, with a budgetary cost close to U\$39 million dollars.

In our effort against impunity, between 2002 and what is in the 2008 budget, we will have increased by 76% the resources for the Judicial Branch and 78% for the Attorney General's Office.

The budget for the special unit of the Attorney General's Office devoted to the attention of homicide cases of trade unionists has increased by 40%. This unit takes care of more than 300 cases prioritized by trade union movements.

The fight against impunity of homicides of unionized workers is carried out under the International Labour Organization guidelines, in agreement between Government, workers and employers. The reports on the progress made, submitted by the ILO office in Colombia, have been positive.

Allow me to affirm before the United Nations: murders and kidnappings have been the work of terrorists. First, it was the Marxist guerrillas that in introducing their perverse scheme of "combination of all forms of struggle", murdered, kidnapped and also penetrated sectors of workers, students, politicians, journalists. Then came the paramilitaries and they did the same, and murdered workers accusing them of collaborating with the guerrillas, which in reciprocity murdered whom they believed to be friends with the paramilitaries. In certain parts of the country, the confrontation of the two guerrillas that still exist is the source of the murder of workers.

To definitely overcome this scourge is an inalienable objective of our Democratic Security Policy.

With regard to this, we have three Government objectives: to consolidate Democratic Security, to consolidate investor confidence and to achieve our social

programme, which is more ambitious than the millennium social goals which we aspire to meet before the date set by the United Nations.

With regard to Democratic Security we are winning, but we have not won yet. With persistence and transparency, Colombia will overcome terrorism which is financed by illicit drugs.

We have a long, respectable, ever deepening democracy. We are approaching the fifth electoral contest presided by this government and the transparency and effectiveness of the guarantees offered to all contenders is more evident. In order to fill 18,332 posts by direct election, there are 86,347 registered candidates from 235 different political origin.

This is happening in a country that five years ago was facing 60,000 terrorists, and where about 11,000 still remain. To fight them, we deepen democracy instead of restricting it, protect liberties instead of suppressing them, stimulate dissent instead of silencing it. Our fight against terrorism is observed by national and international critics, who can be in the country and say what they please without any restriction.

Our democratic practice gives us the political authority to say that those who are up in arms, financed by illicit drugs, are not insurgents against oppression but terrorists against liberty. We do not refuse to negotiate with them, if they cease their violent actions, but we will not allow for negotiation to become a trap that enables the destruction of our democracy. We have achieved the demobilization of 46,000 members of different factions and we are carrying out a costly and complex reintegration process with them, which demands truth, justice and redress for the victims.

And thus, we arrive here at the humanitarian agreement to free kidnapped people being held by FARC terrorists. Most of them were kidnapped before or during the time of the Caguán demilitarized zone, which lasted 42 months. We do not understand that the FARC ask for a demilitarized zone to release the kidnapes if the FARC had that option for so long and did not free them. The country was without law and order for many years, without security, which allowed the almost total takeover by guerrillas and paramilitaries. Citizens do not want terrorists, they implore for the presence of only the State in all regions. We are open to a humanitarian agreement, but we cannot allow demilitarized zones, which are ultimately concentration camps run by terrorists. Nor can we permit those who are released from prison to return to crime, since it would be an affront to the sacrifice of the country's soldiers and police.

We have unilaterally freed 177 FARC members; plus Rodrigo Granda, a high-ranking member of this organization, who was freed upon the request of the President of France, Nicolas Sarkozy. We have given our consent for many people and institutions to be facilitators. The only answer from the terrorists was the treacherous murder of 11 assemblymen from Valle del Cauca, who were held kidnapped for more than 5 years, and the continuous assassination of defenders of democracy, like the one perpetrated last Saturday, in which the victim was Julio Cesar Marentes, candidate to the Mayor's Office in Villarrica, Department of Tolima, who was member of a political party from the Government's coalition.

The options open for the release of kidnapped victims, which includes a French female citizen that is also Colombian, and three American citizens, are not options for the political positioning of terrorism. Colombia will not permit that the recovery of its legitimate and democratic sovereignty be frustrated by giving back national or international space to the murdering power of terrorism. If terrorists want to be involved in politics, they have to renounce their bloody activity and must submit to the Constitution.

Recently, the Government gave its permission to Senator Piedad Córdoba, who is in the opposition to the Government, to play a role as facilitator of the humanitarian agreement. We also accepted the help of President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela, who will meet in a short time with representatives of the FARC. President Chávez has invited some Congressmen from the United States to join him during that meeting, with my Government's support and suggestion that the American delegation be a bipartisan one, so as to preserve a bipartisan approach to the relation with Colombia. We celebrate the positive willingness of the Government of the United States.

We have set some reservations in order to defend our democracy's higher interests and we stimulate both President Chávez and Senator Piedad Córdoba in their task because we are committed with the release of those held kidnapped.

The dismantling of paramilitarism, the weakening of the guerrilla, the recovery of effective guarantees for democracy, beyond rhetoric, the protection of a free press in a country where there were once 15 murdered journalists in one year –this year there has been one case–, are results that permit us to look at the world in the eye and demand complete support for our Democratic Security Policy.

Today there is no paramilitarism. There are guerrillas and drug traffickers. The term "paramilitary" was coined to refer to private criminal organizations whose

objective was to combat guerrillas. Today, the only one that combats guerrillas is the State, which has recovered the monopoly it should have never lost.

With the backing of the United Nations we make a great effort to assist displaced persons and return to them their dignity. We have multiplied by 10 the budget to protect them. The phenomenon remains but has shown a significant reduction.

Today Colombian people feel more confident. The investment rate has gone from 12% of GDP to 26%. Deficit and indebtedness are moving towards a frank reduction. Unemployment, that was around 20%, is now 11%, and we are struggling to decrease it to 7%. We aspire to reduce poverty, that was close to 60%, to a level no higher than 35% in 2010. We are advancing towards the goal of achieving universal access to basic education; we have built an excellent technical training system; we have gone from 300,000 to 1.5 million families living in poverty that receive a subsidy for their children's nutrition and education; we aim to accomplish, in the next three years, the goal of universal access to health services; we are working hard to fulfill, during the current four-year period, the target of providing 5 million microcredits to an equal number of families with scarce resources, as a basic strategy to overcome factors of exclusion.

We have gone from 3.7 million to 9 million children that have benefited from our food programmes. We expect to reach 12 million in 2010.

Our programme "Together", to eliminate extreme poverty, brings together different social tools to cover 1.5 million families.

We reaffirm our commitment to fight against global warming. We have gone from 37,000 to nearly 300,000 natural gas vehicles. We have moved forward in the construction of mass transportation systems in nine cities to reduce individual transportation. With indigenous communities we have advanced in the construction of a series of villages that compose a barrier for the complete recovery of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. Our new forest law prohibits the destruction of the rainforest and the changes to land use. Colombia has 578,000 square kilometers of tropical forest, which constitutes a lung of the Planet. Shortly, we will reach 80,000 Forest Keeper families, who are remunerated by the State, and are committed to abandoning illicit drug production and supervising the recovery of destroyed forests. And we have as a national objective the production of bio-fuels, for which we have 44 million hectares of savannahs, which will allow greater developments, initially in sugar cane and African palm, without risking food security and without destroying a single square millimeter of rainforest.

I thank the United Nations system for all the support given to Colombia and I would like to highlight four areas. The Office against Drugs and Crime has been the guarantor and supervisor of our Forest Keeper Families Program to protect the rainforest from the destructive threat of drug trafficking. The International Labour Organization carries out excellent work in our Workers' Protection Programme. We have extended the mandate of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, to maintain its presence in Colombia for the remainder of my government's term of Office. Also, different UN entities constitute a valuable support in the task of assisting displaced people.

We continue working for a society without exclusions and without class hatred, in permanent constructive debate, one which looks for options, that does not stagnate in insurmountable antagonisms, respectful of the Democratic Constitution and guided by a long-term vision, that feeds itself on an inclusive dialogue everyday.

Thanks to the international community for all the support. I invite you to visit Colombia, to talk to our fellow countrymen and women, and to perceive the collective spirit to fight for the greater happiness of future generations.