

# COLOMBIA



COLOMBIAN MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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## STATEMENT BY

**H.E. Mr. ÁLVARO URIBE VÉLEZ**  
President of the Republic of Colombia

63<sup>rd</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly

General Debate

New York, 24 September 2008

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Upon speaking once again in front of the General Assembly of the United Nations, I would like to congratulate you on your election, Mr. President, and wish you every success.

Colombia continues to fight so that each and every citizen can be confident about living, working, enterprising, studying and being happy in their Homeland. Confidence sustained by democratic security, security for socially responsible investment and the construction of social cohesion.

Crimes against the safety of citizens continue to decrease, but we are not satisfied. So far this year, the number of crimes has been reduced by 30% in comparison to the same period the previous year. We have placed emphasis on the protection of union leaders, teachers and journalists. Of the 11,204 total homicides that have occurred as of September 10<sup>th</sup>, 36 were of workers and teachers affiliated with trade unions, and independent teachers. To date, not a single journalist has been murdered. The Government grants individual protection to 8,612 citizens, 1,462 of whom belong to trade unions. Our determination to combat impunity is ongoing. Between 1991 and 2001, only 2 sentences were issued. Thanks to efforts in recent years in terms of budget and strengthening of Justice, the security policy and the tripartite agreement between workers, business leaders and the Government, sponsored by the International Labour Organization, 199 persons have received sentences for the murder of workers, 134 of them are in prison. Of the 123 sentences carried out, 85 have occurred in the last 3 years.

In the past, terrorist organizations penetrated the labor movement resulting in the murder of its members. The dismantling of the paramilitaries has eliminated this source of suffering, but terrorist guerrillas persist in committing such crimes, as it recently happened in the south of the Country with the murder of a group of teachers by the FARC.

Recently, our tranquility in the absence of terrorist attacks was shattered by the car bomb set off by the FARC, which destroyed the Justice building in the city of Cali, and left several people dead and others injured, as well as many poor families with their small businesses and homes destroyed.

Of the approximately 60,000 terrorists that ravaged the Country at the start of the Government, 48,000 have abandoned their criminal organizations and have joined the reintegration program, which is a great challenge for Colombia. In 2008, as of September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2,436 guerrilla members had demobilized, 2,147 of them from the FARC.

In a democracy of opinion such as ours, the sustainability of democratic security depends on its credibility, which in turn is based on effectiveness and transparency. This transparency is tantamount to the observance of Human Rights, fundamental among us. From them comes our respect for liberties in the midst of the fight against terrorism; the openness for vigilance, criticism and debate at the national and international level; a formative, world-leading effort in Human Rights within our Armed Forces; permanent adjustment of the operative protocols through measures like those that require soldiers to wait for the presence of a judicial delegate before moving the body of a member of a criminal organization killed in action; the will to investigate and assist in the investigation of any type of accusation; and, the modernization of military criminal legislation.

On December 10<sup>th</sup>, our country will voluntarily enter into the Universal Periodic Review in Human Rights, the new mechanism created by the United Nations, which is an additional contribution to the public discussion of our new road map on the matter, the work with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and with the OAS, and the policy of truth, justice and redress of victims, which along with the historical memory must heal wounds and help to put out the flames of violence forever.

There are intangible results of democratic security: citizens have greater faith in the State, and they seek their protection, overcoming the past indifference of some and the inclination of many to address their risks by their own means; we have recovered the monopoly over the weapons of the State and Official Justice; citizens have lost their fear to denounce, give testimony and cooperate with the Armed Forces and with Justice; victims have also left behind their fear, today they are coming forward to claim their rights.

One year ago, I looked out at this Assembly with the frustration of not having been able to rescue Ingrid Betancourt and those held in captivity with her. Today,

thanks to the heroism, planning and bloodless effectiveness of our soldiers, she is a symbol of freedom, a freedom that we claim to liberate those that are still kidnapped and to put an end to this shameful crime in our Homeland.

### Social Cohesion

Social cohesion validates security. Meeting the Millennium Goals, set for 2015, is a real urgency for us as an essential part of building social cohesion. We are close to reaching the goal of no more than 3% of children under the age of 5 being malnourished. We are determined to reach 0 and we now begin the schooling of this first childhood. In 2010, we hope to have reached 100% in basic education coverage. Toward the goal of averaging 10.6 years of education for the population between ages 15 and 24, we have already achieved an average of more than 9 years. We have decreased repetition from 6.1% to 3.3%, the goal is 2.3%. Mortality rates for children under 5 years of age have gone from 37 to 20 per 1,000 births, the goal is 17. That same indicator for children younger than 1 year has decreased from 31 to 15.6, the goal is 14. Vaccination coverage is reaching 95%, the percentage defined in the Millennium Goals for 2015. Our great challenge is to reduce the pronounced disparities between regions.

Despite the difficulties of the economy, we maintain our full determination to meet the social goals through programs such as Families in Action, Bank of Opportunities, the Together Network, which focuses social tools on the poorest spheres. This is backed up by very demanding goals in child nutrition, educational coverage and quality, vocational training, health insurance, connectivity and good management of social resources. With regard to this last one, our administrative reform, which has reached 411 State entities, has as its goal to prevent the State from being discredited, eliminate bureaucratic wastefulness, and seek social efficiency.

### Environment

The mortgage and financial crisis are minor problems compared to environmental risks. Although Colombia contributes 0.35% of greenhouse gas emissions, it is highly vulnerable to the ravages of climate change from ice-melting and floods, maintains a rainforest comprising more than 51% of its territory and is a great net contributor of oxygen.

Some of our most important environmental programs are: the construction of mass transportation systems in 9 cities, with planning underway for 10 more;

incorporating 66,000 rural families as forest rangers, who are paid by the State for maintaining collective areas free from illicit crops and supervising the recovery and conservation of the forest, under the oversight of the United Nations; preserving 257 protected natural areas; implementing aqueduct and basic sanitation projects in the 32 departments and the 1102 municipalities; and stimulating alternative energy sources like wind power and biofuels.

### Biofuels

There are three common objections to biofuels: the risk of destroying the rainforest, the elimination of areas for agricultural food production, and the low productivity measured in energy spent to produce energy. Colombia has 578,000 square kilometers of rainforest and 43 million hectares of savannah. We will not allow the rainforest to be touched, protecting it is our main contribution in the fight against global warming. With the available savannah we can broaden our agricultural production concentrated in 5 million hectares, increase livestock to 24 million heads of cattle and develop, without affecting food production, a large biofuel industry that generates good quality employment, increases income, and becomes an alternative to coca crops, which feed terrorism. Thanks to sources of energy such as sugar cane and African oil palm, which also protects the soil from direct sunlight and prevents erosion, our productivity is high: for every energy unit used, 8 energy units are produced in ethanol, and 6.5 units in biodiesel.

### Illicit Drugs

Illicit drugs are a great enemy of the environment and they fuel terrorism. Colombia still suffers from violence because of illicit drugs. We speak of shared responsibility not to assign exclusive responsibilities to consumer countries, as unfortunately, there is also consumption among our youth. We speak of shared responsibility for the world to evenly combat production, traffic, consumption, asset laundering, chemical precursors.

Our Government requests that consumption be punished, in our country and across the international community. We have extradited more than 800 persons, this year we must spray 130,000 hectares of coca crops and 100,000 must be manually eradicated. Over the last 5 years, 10,000 properties have been confiscated. However, there is no significant reduction in illicit crop areas and consumption is on the rise. Let us reflect: to prevent and rehabilitate with a geometric growth in consumption arising from permissiveness is more difficult; the destruction of the rainforest to plant

coca, the erosion of the soil and the pollution caused by chemical precursors are enormous attempts upon the environmental balance. Whoever buys a personal dose of illicit drugs encourages a child to become a distributor and later on, a feared criminal. Whoever buys a personal dose of illicit drugs helps to set off a car bomb in Colombia and to destroy 4 trees from our Amazon rainforest.

Investors from all over the world are arriving in Colombia nowadays. We are welcoming more than twice as many tourists as we were 5 years ago, from every corner. In 2002, we had 2 free trade agreements; in the past year we signed more than 10; by 2010 we expect them to be more than 45. The eyes of many, who looked on our Nation with skepticism or who spoke of Colombia as a failed state, can now see clear signals of institutional strength and democratic boldness.

Today, Colombia generates more trust, more respect. But our work goes on. To free us all from the horrors of drug trafficking, terrorism and poverty, we need more resolute support from the international community.

Thank you very much to the United Nations for their integral presence in our Country.