



COLOMBIA: AN OPPORTUNITY FOR LASTING SUCCESS

“Just as Colombia appears poised to put decades of conflict behind it, the fate of the FTA stands as a vote of confidence in Colombia’s future.”
– Under Secretary for Political Affairs R. Nicholas Burns

With strong bipartisan support, the United States has sustained a substantial investment in Colombia’s successful struggle against narcoterrorism. Our support for Colombia’s people is bearing fruit: Colombia is turning a corner in bringing security, prosperity, and justice to its citizens. Our continued commitment will help Colombia consolidate its success by accelerating economic growth and ensuring that the government provides social services to all its citizens.

U.S. assistance through Plan Colombia and tariff preferences under the Andean Trade Preference Act are key elements of our joint strategy to promote peace, justice, and prosperity in Colombia. The U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement will make those preferences permanent and will give U.S. exports the same access to Colombian markets that Colombian products enjoy in the United States. These trade benefits are vital to helping Colombia emerge from a ruinous, long-running conflict. Approval of The U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement will also show the world that the United States stands by its friends. More importantly, it will help build a dynamic, successful, and competitive region whose people can be full partners as we address the common challenges of the 21st century.

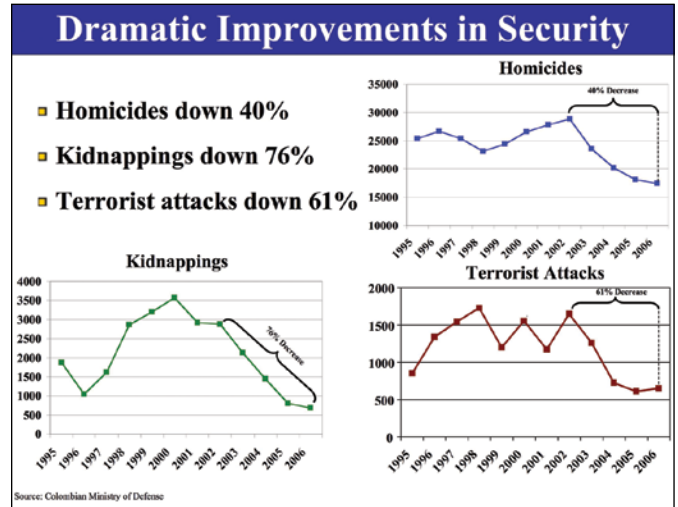
FROM NEAR FAILING STATE TO STRATEGIC PARTNER

Eight years ago, Colombia was a near failing state. Violence was rampant, citizens were fleeing the country, and economic activity was plummeting. Since then, the United States and Colombia have worked together to combat violence and instability.

Security has improved markedly. Under President Uribe, homicides have dropped by 40 percent, kidnappings by 76 percent, and terrorist attacks by 61 percent – and violence continued to plummet in 2007. Over 45,000 terrorists have demobilized – including 32,000 paramilitary members – and the FARC and ELN are



SOURCE: GOVERNMENT OF COLOMBIA



significantly weakened. Colombia is doing what no other country has attempted during a peace process, holding irregular forces accountable for their crimes.

At the same time, Colombia has laid the foundation for bringing government services to areas retaken from illegal armed groups, and increased investment in alternative development, human rights protection, and social services. Mayors have returned to their towns. Enrollment in public schools is now at 92 percent.



SOURCE: GOVERNMENT OF COLOMBIA

Drug cartels have been dismantled. Colombia has extradited over 647 criminals – mostly drug traffickers – to the United States. Cocaine production has fallen by a third, seizures of cocaine bound for the United States have more than doubled, and, while estimates differ, coca cultivation has declined. Interdiction and eradication successes have kept an average of 400 metric tons per year of cocaine from reaching the U.S. market. Alternative development programs have benefited over 135,000 families and supported over 158,000 hectares of licit crops.

Thanks in part to increased security, Colombia’s economy is rebounding and people’s lives are improving. Roads are open.

Displaced farmers are returning to their lands. Economic growth topped over 6.8 percent in 2006, the highest in eight years. Unemployment and poverty are at their lowest levels in a decade.



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“Colombia’s transformation in less than a decade from failing state to thriving democracy is one of the greatest victories for the cause of human rights in our world today.”

– Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice

PRIORITIZING HUMAN RIGHTS

The United States is working closely with Colombia to promote human rights, ensure access to justice, and end impunity. Under Uribe, Colombia has come a long way in advancing these goals. Labor conditions in Colombia have significantly improved. Working with the International Labor Organization, Colombia



President Uribe with ILO President Daniel Fuenes de Rioja

SOURCE: GOVERNMENT OF COLOMBIA

has enhanced its labor laws and their implementation and taken steps to protect union members and end impunity in cases of violence against them. Thanks to these measures and overall improvements in Colombia’s security

situation, according to NGO figures, homicides of trade unionists dropped over 75 percent in the last six years.

Much of the improvement occurred because of Colombia’s protection programs for its vulnerable citizens. The Ministry of Interior and Justice’s \$34 million program provides protection to over 6,900 individuals. Over a third of this program’s budget – \$9.6 million – goes to protect more than 1,700 trade unionists.

Colombia has committed itself to ending impunity. With the historic transformation of its criminal justice system now complete, cases move from arrest to verdict in months instead of years, and conviction rates have soared from less than three percent to over 60 percent. To end the backlog of labor cases, working with the International Labor Organization, Colombia has created a \$1.5 million labor sub-unit to investigate priority cases of violence against trade unionists.

BUILDING ON PROGRESS

Colombia has designed a strategy to face the challenges of consolidating these gains by expanding state presence and government services in areas reclaimed from illegal armed groups.

While maintaining pressure on narcotics traffickers and terrorist organizations through eradication, interdiction, and extradition, the strategy outlines a plan to expand government programs in remote rural areas and puts increased emphasis on security, social services, and assistance to vulnerable groups, such as Afro-Colombians, indigenous groups, and displaced persons. It also devotes more resources to human rights and judicial reforms to end impunity in these cases. Our assistance supports these efforts and complements Colombia’s capabilities in areas such as counternarcotics. As local capacity grows, we are working with the Government of Colombia as it prepares to assume responsibility for these programs. However, bilateral assistance is only part of the solution.

“Trade fosters human opportunities that build hope and give people a stake in their society’s success.”

– Deputy Secretary of State John D. Negroponte

ADDRESSING ROOT CAUSES OF INSTABILITY

Colombia is a prime example of the intrinsic link between prosperity and security. To continue its progress in the long term, and create new economic alternatives to drugs and violence, Colombia needs investment, trade, and economic growth. The U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement is vital to supporting Colombia in its success and encouraging yet further progress. It will bring increased economic opportunity to the people of Colombia through sustained economic growth, new employment opportunities, increased investment, and by consolidating anti-corruption reforms and drawing millions into the formal economy. The 270,000 jobs it will bring to Colombians will weaken the lure of the illicit economic sector. Provisions in the agreement will reinforce democracy by fighting corruption, increasing transparency, and fostering accountability and rule of law. Through these changes, the agreement will address the underlying causes of the social ills that allow narcotraffickers and insurgent groups to operate.

COLOMBIA’S SUCCESS IS OUR SUCCESS

Supporting Colombia, a key U.S. ally, increases stability in our Hemisphere, thereby strengthening our security and economic interests in the region. The United States has been a proud partner in Colombia’s success and will continue to work side-by-side with the Colombian people as they further bolster their security and improve their lives. U.S. support and the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement are vital to ensuring Colombia continues on its trajectory of positive change and continues to be a steadfast strategic partner for the United States and a democratic anchor in the region. By embracing democratic governance and open markets, Colombia has made a strategic choice for a better future for its people, and needs our support in doing so. It is time for us to stand by Colombia and its people, showing our commitment to responsible democracies that seek increased engagement, partnership, and trade with the United States. ■