

COLOMBIA



UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY 69TH REGULAR SESSION

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PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF COLOMBIA**

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President, Secretary General, Heads of State and Government, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen:

First, on behalf of the Government of Colombia, I would like to congratulate Minister Kutesa for his election as President of the General Assembly and to express Colombia's support for his work in promoting a Post-2015 development agenda that responds to humanity's current challenges.

The Sustainable Development Goals, which were recently adopted after an open, transparent and inclusive negotiation process, should be at the centre of this Agenda.

Mister President, distinguished delegates:

In a world full of bad news, of war, of terrorism, of disease and illness, I would like to bring a ray of hope to this Assembly: the hope that, after more than half a century of conflict, Colombia will soon be at peace.

If we achieve this – a goal that Colombians have unsuccessfully sought for, for so long – then there is hope for peace in any part of the world, despite how difficult things can seem right now.

Today, I can say to the international community that we are closer, than ever before, to achieving this peace.

The process that has been taking place in Havana over the past two years with the FARC guerrilla group has been a serious, realistic, efficient and credible one, with concrete results.

We agreed on a 5-point agenda, of which we have achieved agreements on 3: comprehensive rural development, political participation and the illicit drug problem.

In rural matters, we have agreed to unprecedented investment in agricultural development, working to give farmers access to land and to generate greater welfare for farming families.

In the matter of political participation, what we seek is very simple: to broaden our democracy to build peace and promote citizen participation, and to forever sever the link between politics and weapons.

With regards to the illicit drug problem, we agreed to continue dismantling the drug mafia structures, to promote a national programme of crop substitution and alternative development and to address the problem of consumption from a public health perspective.

The agreement also includes a commitment by the FARC to contribute effectively to a definitive solution to the illicit drug problem and to end any relationship they may have had with the phenomenon.

A Colombia without coca and without conflict was an impossible dream just a few years or decades ago, and today I can tell you it is a real possibility. Just imagine it.

We have already begun discussion of the last two substantive points: victims and the end of the conflict.

This war has left millions of victims, who never had a voice before, and who are now at the centre of the process.

We are working for the fulfilment of their rights to justice, truth, reparation and non-repetition. But above all, we are working to ensure there are no more victims.

In an act, which I believe is without precedent in the history of the world, representatives of the victims are explaining their situation, exposing their pain and setting out their expectations before the Government's and guerrilla group's negotiators.

They are the main protagonists and beneficiaries of the peace we seek!

Constanza Turbay, who represents the courage and bravery of our women and who lost most of her family at the hands of the guerrillas, had the opportunity to face the perpetrators and hear directly their expressions of sincere remorse. In her own words, the victims are "*substituting their pain with the hope of peace*".

Another woman, Juanita Barragan, who spent several years of her youth within the ranks of the FARC, was able to tell her former bosses in Havana: "*Please do not accept more children to fight your war*". Today, she wants to be a lawyer and work for children.

There are so many cases! So many voices that are finally being heard!

We have also created a subcommittee, which includes the participation of active military and police personnel, to analyse how the final bilateral ceasefire process would take place as well as the demobilisation and laying down of arms by the guerrillas, upon signature of the final agreement.

So, now I can report to the international community that Colombia has made substantial progress in its effort to end the armed conflict that has affected us so greatly and that inevitably affects the region and the world.

And when the post-conflict comes, we will face immense challenges to reintegrate those who have demobilised, to ensure state presence in areas affected by conflict, and to guarantee security. The support and contribution of the international community will be so important, that we call upon it from now!

In this privileged setting, I would like to thank so many nations and multilateral agencies – especially the United Nations – that have expressed their support for the peace process and their willingness to help in whatever is needed, not only now but also in the implementation of the agreements and the post-conflict stage.

I said this on August 7th, in my inaugural speech upon taking office for a second term as President of Colombia, and I repeat it today before the world's nations.

Whilst across the world various conflict scenarios proliferate, Colombia aspires to bring good news for humanity: the news that the last armed conflict in the western hemisphere is coming to an end!

If we are successful, as we expect to be, we will be ready to share our experience with other countries. We are sure that our case can become a model and a beacon of hope for the world's other conflicts.

In Colombia, we are seeking peace because the suffering of our fellow citizens hurts us, because we do not want any more victims, women or children in war. So, we understand the pain and express our solidarity with so many nations that today are suffering from war, suffering nameless atrocities, due to – it must be said – the impotence of the international community

We are not oblivious to the suffering of those who live in countries such as Syria, Iraq, Libya, the Sahel and Ukraine, and condemn the ruthless terrorism of ISIS.

We are not indifferent to the suffering of so many families in Palestine and Israel, victims of armed confrontations.

Neither to the loss of life due to epidemics such as Ebola in Africa.

As we approach this Organization's 70th anniversary, we find ourselves at a definitive moment for the legitimacy of the international system embodied by the United Nations.

The complete respect for international law and the purposes and principles established in the Charter is essential to attaining lasting solutions to overcome conflict, and progress in the fulfilment of the legitimate aspirations of the people.

In confrontation, it is imperative to recover ethical principles, which are fundamental to humanity, and to remove children, women and civilians from these tragedies.

Colombia affords privilege to negotiated political solutions.

Today we have to ask questions that are not rhetorical but are true: Why are there people against peace? Why do some see war as the only way out?

Maybe because without it they lose their power; because they have become used to making a living from it; because they profit from it; because they cannot imagine life without it.

We have to dissuade the promoters of permanent war. We have to convince them that this is not the way and convert them into promoters of peace. We are doing just that in Colombia and we must do so in every corner of the planet.

The United Nations was established precisely to prevent conflict and to seek peace.

A fuel of the conflict in Colombia and around the world is, without a doubt, drug trafficking.

Colombia has promoted a serious, technical and objective discussion of the methods and results of the so-called "War on Drugs", and we have had some achievements at hemispheric level.

Last week, at the Special Session of the OAS General Assembly in Guatemala, we achieved hemispheric consensus on several positions and adopted a resolution that shows that we can move forward together on this issue.

These results will help us to be more prepared to be able to achieve progress at the Special Session on Drugs that the United Nations has called for in 2016.

Mister President, Delegates:

Last month, in the inaugural speech of my second mandate, I set out for Colombians the vision that will guide our actions.

I want to make Colombia a country at total peace, an equal country, and a country that is the most educated in Latin America by 2025.

This is a vision that also brings us closer to what will be the Sustainable Development Goals for the post-2015 period: ambitious goals that address humanity's most pressing social, economic and environmental problems.

The good economic climate that Colombia is experiencing, progress in the social indicators, particularly poverty reduction and job creation, as well as the peace process, allow us to believe in the possibility of achieving this vision.

It is this Colombia, the one that is overcoming poverty, has regained control of its territory, is growing at the world's highest levels and has successful social equality policies, which is seeking peace.

I envisage the same for Latin America and the Caribbean as I envisage for my country.

That we may be a region at peace, with equality and better education.

A region that makes the transition from resource-based economies to knowledge-based economies.

A region in which entrepreneurship and innovation are the engines of development.

A region with socially and environmentally responsible companies that transform our future.

As I said in this Assembly in 2010, this should be Decade of Latin America and the Caribbean. And now before the world's nations, I reiterate a call to my region – Latin America and the Caribbean – to maintain our goal.

And to the international community, I make an impassioned appeal for us to put all that we can – all – into ensuring that humanity overcomes war.

We are losing direction when we look at the tragedies that humanity is suffering, without being pained by them, without the world waking up and taking decisive action to address them.

We cannot allow ourselves to no longer be shocked by war.

It is time to wake up! It is time to act!

Thank you.