

# COLOMBIA



COLOMBIAN MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

140 EAST 57TH STREET, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10022

STAMENT BY

H.E. MR. DIEGO PALACIO BETANCOURT

MINISTER OF SOCIAL PROTECTION  
COLOMBIA

60TH SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE UNITED NATIONS

HIGH-LEVEL MEETING OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON HIV/AIDS

New York, June 2 2006

*Please check against delivery*

Mr. President, Mr. Secretary-General, ladies and gentleman,

Since 2001, when Colombia joined the Declaration of Commitments on HIV/AIDS, the country has moved forward in the right direction to achieve the goals set in the Declaration. As an essential step, the country is in the process of improving the monitoring and evaluation systems of the HIV/AIDS programs in order to have a more reliable and precise report of indicators. It is worth highlighting the thrust the National AIDS Council, as a coordination agent that brings together many sectors involved in the response, has given to the development of plans and projects aimed at reaching the Millennium Development Goals; but above all the incorporation of new resources, which – while still insufficient to contain the epidemic –,are aimed at achieving Universal access both in treatment and prevention.

Mr. President,

The development and implementation of the Sexual and Reproductive Health Policy, is a key element of Colombia's response: the existing links between sexual violence, teen pregnancy and maternal mortality with HIV, have allowed us to move forward towards more efficient and comprehensive strategies and towards a mutual reinforcement of these issues within health services. On the

other hand, we know that gender inequality, poverty and the social marginalization of vulnerable populations, especially women, girls and young people, have a negative effect on Sexual and Reproductive Health indicators, including those that deal with Sexually Transmitted Infections and HIV. Our commitment is to continue working to generate favorable conditions that reduce the vulnerability factors of the population to HIV infection and guarantee the respect, protection and promotion of human rights, in particular sexual and reproductive rights.

Furthermore, in the area of prevention, with the support of the European Economic Community and UNAIDS, Colombia consolidated, with successful results and guaranteed sustainability through State resources, the component that aims at reducing the transmission of HIV from mother to child. Regarding the promotion of health, Colombia has prioritized the youth population: with resources from the Global Fund, --which are being managed in their entirety by civil society, with the support of the State and International Cooperation Agencies—we have worked intensively to reduce the vulnerability of teenagers in municipalities affected by forced displacement. The attention services in the context of reform to the health sector and the administrative decentralization of the country have also been strengthened. It is necessary that education, as well as assistance services in Sexual and Reproductive Health are aimed at fulfilling the needs of young people and that they are sensitive to gender and culture. It is also required that, within prevention programs, including those dealing with mother-child transmission, there is guaranteed access to family planning, including the access to male and female condoms, and to counseling and voluntary testing.

Nonetheless, in Colombia it is still necessary to give further push to the strategies of characterization and preventive approach for the vulnerable populations that have been affected the most by HIV, such as men who have sexual relations with men, sexual workers and those deprived of their freedom. We believe that only through the focusing of our efforts where the epidemic is concentrated will we be able to stop its advance and prevent its spread to wider sectors of the population. Nonetheless, the multiplicity and complexity of the work at hand, requires greater support from donor countries. Only by cutting the poverty-sickness-poverty cycle, will we be able to avoid in Colombia and in other countries the tough scenarios of a generalized epidemic.

Furthermore, and although not exempt from difficulties, the country has made efforts to increase access to comprehensive attention services and specifically to antiretroviral treatments to people living with the virus. The regional joint negotiation efforts carried out in Lima in 2003 and Buenos Aires in 2005, which resulted in better prices for medications and supplies and facilitated access to treatment to thousands of people, are praiseworthy. Colombia's national health coverage system, which covers approximately 70% of the population, includes all medication molecules, follow-up exams and even formulas to be administered to

children born to infected mothers, recommended by the management protocols. Parallel to that, we have signed an agreement memo with the Clinton Foundation and we have passed a law that provides access to low cost antiretroviral medications.

Mr. President,

The importance of this Session and the renewal of the commitment to give an adequate response to the AIDS pandemic not only requires the political Will of States; it calls equally for a greater interest in understanding the national contexts and for a clear commitment to resource allocation that allows to bridge the gap generated by HIV/AIDS. The control of the epidemic goes through the execution of sustainable development policies and through the effective implementation of strategies to combat poverty, that benefit the population and provide real access to those that are already affected. The fight against the stigma and discrimination needs to generate real conditions of equality not only between people, but between States.

Mr. President,

Without a doubt, today we have identified important achievements in fulfilling the commitments of the Declaration and equally we have highlighted the significant gaps in reaching the goal of universal access. In this respect, Colombia is committed to doubling its ongoing efforts, not only on its own, but within the group of Latin American nations that work together to overcome the barriers for the control of the pandemic. Nonetheless, this forum must serve as a warning and bring forth the significant difficulties of keeping the epidemic under control. We urge the international community and donor countries to provide greater and sustained support and to cast their eyes on the region, particularly on Colombia. The characteristics of the epidemic and the dynamic of the virus in the population is changing at a greater rate than the necessary resources for prevention and treatment are being appropriated.

Mr. President,

The complexities and challenges posed by the AIDS pandemic requires us to work in a more coordinated fashion, with effective actions that are only positive if the necessary resources for the co-financing of national responses are appropriated. Only in this way, will the solidarity symbolized by the red ribbons that are always present at this type of events go beyond the praiseworthy attitude of empathy that we profess towards those infected and transform itself into global solidarity, based on progress and mutual support, where we all can and must contribute something to achieve universal access to prevention and integral attention to HIV/AIDS.

Thank you.