

COLOMBIA



COLOMBIAN MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
Item 3 (a) Promoting Full Employment and Decent Work for All

45TH SESSION

Mr. Carlos A. Suárez
Minister Counsellor

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Mr. Chairman,

My delegation congratulates you and the other members of the Bureau on your election and for your effective work during this session of the Commission.

Mr. Chairman,

Government actions aimed at promoting and generating employment and decent work opportunities are fundamental to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, in particular on issues related to the reduction of extreme poverty and hunger, and to sustainable development. In the case of Colombia, and since the World Summit on Social Development, our country has increased efforts to promote higher levels and quality of employment.

For my country, it is clear that employment policies require the creation of economic, institutional and sectorial conditions that strengthen the generation of wealth in countries. But also, it is indispensable that growth benefits all the population, specially, the poorest and most vulnerable, developing their capacity to generate their own income. For this reason, it is necessary to avoid in this subject any dilemma between growth and welfare.

Between 1996 and 2001, Colombia went through a difficult situation. The national economy then grew at an average annual rate of 1% and had in 1999 the first decrease in production in a century. Poverty reached 58% in 2000. In a complex environment of insecurity and uncertainty, levels of unemployment were close to 20% in cities, and 15,5% at the national level.

As of 2002, the government of President Alvaro Uribe began to apply policies to reverse this situation. The positive result has been unquestionable. The economic growth between 2003 and 2006 reached an annual average of 5%. National and foreign investment recovered, the last one reaching remarkable levels in 2005 and 2006. All this, combined with social policies, allowed for a reduction in poverty of 10 percentage points; a reduction in unemployment at the national level of around 12%; and to an increase in labor income of 10%.

This transformation was possible because of comprehensive and interrelated measures, like the democratic security policy that has reduced all criminality indicators and has created conditions of confidence in the economic and social environment of the country. The economic reactivation policy that strengthened macroeconomic discipline stabilized public finances without affecting social investment, created favorable conditions for investment, and opened new markets for products belonging to the national economy. And the Tools for Social Equity policy, that includes programs in education, social protection, rural development, public services, among others, of great impact in the construction of human and social capital.

Mr. Chairman,

Taking into account our experience and the plans for coming years, Colombia considers that in terms of employment, in addition to macroeconomic and general policies, it is indispensable to consider the heterogeneity of realities that exist between urban and rural areas, as well as between population groups and geographic zones. For that reason, focused programs to promote employment in specific groups are of special importance. In the Colombian case, programs have been developed to promote stable income to rural families. Programs such as "Young People in Action" and "Rural young people", aim to promote access of young adults, specially the poorest, to the labor market, specially the poorest. Also programs to promote employment and entrepreneurship for women, like the initiatives "Micro-entrepreneur Woman Head of Household", "Enterprise Education for Women Plan" and "National Woman Entrepreneur Fair". In addition, there are programs for education and labor and social integration of vulnerable groups, among them, the victims of displacement and reintegrated members of violent groups that have been demobilized.

Colombia also assigns priority to the promotion of micro, small and medium companies, which generate a high percentage of jobs in developing countries, as an option to generate employment and to reduce informal labor. On this subject, it is important to consider the heterogeneity and the different levels of insertion of such companies in economic systems to diminish the risks of failure of new enterprise projects, in special those of the most vulnerable segments of the population; and to promote in the international front the opening of markets to products of these productive units of great social impact.

The promotion of access to education, and to quality education is also essential. The long term unemployment level is related to the existing gap between the qualification of the workers and the requirements of the employers. This situation is evident in emerging economies, in which greater labor demand is transferred towards sectors that require more educated personnel. In this field, Colombia is developing a strategy aimed at the achievement of universal access to schooling, and has strengthened the educational task assigned to SENA, the state institution for technological education, that increased its number of students from one million and one hundred thousand in 2002, to 4 million in 2006.

In order to promote decent work it is necessary to increase the scope of social security services, to diminish the levels of informal labor, and to promote the protection of fundamental labor rights. In this area, in Colombia, in the last four years, the social security health service subsidized by the State, reached near 9 million additional poor citizens, including people who work in informal sectors. According to our Development Plan, in 2009, the coverage of social security in health must cover all of the lowest income population.

As it is known, an objective of the United Nations is the eradication of child labor. Besides its ominous effects on children, this phenomenon limits access to the education system, generates perpetuation of poverty, affects human capital, and aggravates inequity. The Colombian Government will strengthen the Prevention and Eradication of the Child Work Policy, in the national and local level. All international cooperation resources relate to child labor must be applied within this Policy, to obtain greater effectiveness.

Mr. Chairman,

Colombia considers it essential that international efforts aimed at contributing to the increase of employment levels are enhanced, strengthening international cooperation channels and technical assistance among countries. Also, increasing decisively the strength of mechanisms through which the United Nations system effectively responds to the needs of developing and least developed countries.

Finally, my delegation calls the attention to a commitment that the international community assumed in 1995, and which is still far from being reached. It is the situation of migratory workers that do not enjoy the protections established in national and international instruments. On this front, as well as in those of cooperation for technology transfers and free trade agreements with transparent and equitable principles, we still have great challenges to advance in the objective of full employment and decent work for all.

Thank you very much.