

COLOMBIA



COLOMBIAN MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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Mr. President,

I come again to the General Assembly, at a time when Colombia, the people and the institutions advance in achieving democratic security. This would allow all citizens to live in peace, express their political ideas, without any risk to their lives, to support or oppose the Government in full respect of diverse opinions.

The democratic security policy has shown significant progress in reducing homicides kidnappings, and other terrorist acts, population displacement and illicit crops. There is still a lot to be done, but if we are persistent we will prevail.

Democratic security is one of the elements of Colombia's highest priorities: to recover credibility and confidence by our citizens in our institutions. When that trust is destroyed, the ties between the citizen and the nation are broken. Such trust needs transparent public and private actions, as well as economic reactivation and social cohesion.

Social cohesion builds trust among citizens and between them and the State. Social cohesion is the defeat of poverty and the promotion of equal opportunities. Colombia created a legal framework to assure that the benefits from economic growth would lead towards poverty eradication. Yet Colombia's growth, which during the 1960's and 1970's was an average of 4.5%, fell to an average of 2% after 1980. This decline encouraged an Informal economy, marked by misery and poverty. The contrast between the formal private sector and the informal sector was evident. The first one being fair with its workers, in compliance with its tax payments, but growing at a slow pace, while the latter, with its overwhelming force extended poverty among the population.

Mr. President,

Narcotrafficking, financier of terror, reverted the trend towards land distribution created by agrarian reforms.

Between 1994 and 2000 unemployment among heads of household grew from 4% to 10%, and overall unemployment grew from 7.5% to 19%. In relatively few years the GDP deficit increased from 1.5% to 4.2%, and public debt from 24% to 54% of GDP. And 40% of the public budget was allocated to debt servicing. Very low levels of private investment only made this situation worse.

Defeating poverty requires strong and sustained economic growth. This in turn requires physical and legal security, transparent rules and macroeconomic stability. Last year, we foresaw a growth of 2.5%, but instead it was 4%. This year we are making great efforts, and should achieve almost 5% growth. This is happening because we are recovering Investors confidence. With such growth, unemployment has fallen three points, although It is still very high. A positive sign is shown when jobs are being created in the sectors that will provide for social security and a fair wage for the workers. All this has happened despite fiscal restrictions to public investment and in the midst of an intense struggle to eliminate illicit drugs which have become so important that they now affect the level of growth in our agricultural sector as a whole.

Mr. President.

At a time, my generation explained violence as the result of social inequities. My country's experience in many decades, allowed me to affirm that terrorist violence has increased misery and has destroyed the possibility to eliminate social inequity. Violence has worsen poverty and has made use of it to perdure.

Our goal is to reduce poverty in an equal or higher percentage of economic growth. To a great extent, our social Investment program depends on a sound and sustained economic growth. Therefore, our social investment program goes hand in hand with democratic security policy. If we neglect democratic security, terrorism will grow, we will lose momentum in defeating it, investment will be affected, the strength of our economic recovery will weaken and we would be left without resources for social investment.

Today's equality is that of economic and social opportunities. This is why we have placed so much emphasis on education. We have increased elementary enrollment by 750,000, and the country still needs 1,250,000 new places. In 25 months we have multiplied by 2.5 technical training, with the promotion of basic employment skills to enable young people to accede to the work force while continuing their education and training. In the cities and In the countryside, we have been carrying out a silent revolution in technical training and capacity building that will reach four million young people a year by 2006.

A subsidy is being paid to 340,000 poor families to improve their children's nutrition and ensure the school attendace. There are now 503,000 children in the new program of breakfast for the under-5s, and this number will double in 2005. And that, together with the school restaurants and the program for community mothers, will reach more than six million children.

This coming December, when this administration will have been in office for 2B months, more than four million poor Colombians will have joined the Subsidised Health Program, in addition to the 13 million who already protected. Legal and Administrative reforms to increase coverage, with transparency and with an effective and efficient use of resources.

Colombia has more than 600,000 senior adults living in extreme poverty. In the past, 60,000 of them received a cash subsidy. This year we have raised the number to 172,000. We are now starting on a new program to deliver one meal a day to 400,000 more senior adults who do not receive the cash subsidy.

This year we are paying more than US\$100 million in subsidies to provide electricity to the popular sectors.

We are also subsidising more than 7,000 demobilized and reintegrated members who have disengaged from one or another violent group. This action is part of a huge silent but effective peace process. When one of these persons is reintegrated, he perceives the support of the State and the community, reconciles himself with the institutions, embraces democracy and peaceful coexistence and, rejects any justification for violence. We hope that many thousands more will follow and we require international cooperation for this program.

We are subsidising 21,000 ranger families, who were formerly involved in illicit drug crops and are now committed to eliminate them and to recover the tropical forests. Their task is

essential for mankind keeping in mind the rich Colombian biodiversity and its 220,000 square miles of jungle, threatened by illicit drugs.

To guarantee their food security, we are now subsidising 700,000 farmers, and this number will soon rise to one million.

We are also subsidising the crops of peasant associations until they get productive and competitive.

Poverty indicators should take account of such subsidies, which are usually not included when measuring the income of those families.

Colombia has suffered a tragedy in internal human displacement. We have reduced its incidence by 40%, but it is still high. We have facilitated voluntary returns of more 70,000 people and, we expect to increase this trend. A single State agency has multiplied by eight its budget to attend displaced persons.

As a consequence of a law approved at the beginning of this Government, the process for ownership extinction of illegally-acquired assets have moved along fast. We expect that this mechanism will be used to advance a comprehensive agrarian reform.

The Colombian people have made an effort to pay additional taxes in order to finance security and recover our social investment levels, for a total that represents 2 points of GDP.

We have received the support of the multilateral banks but we require a better understanding from the financial markets, with longer-term loans and lower interest rates.

We are engaged in an intense struggle, and need better access to the markets of the industrialised countries.

Mr. President,

I reiterate Colombia's commitment to multilateralism. It has to go to a continuous process of improvement to be more effective and recover the lost consensus to guarantee peace around the world. The betiding of this consensus requires each State to feel that it is being heard and that it is being taken into account.

I am grateful for the support of the United Nations agencies in social matters.

We are fully prepared to support the efforts of the international community in favour of the consolidation of democracy and security in the region, especially in Haiti. Colombia will be part of the United Nations Stabilisation Mission to that country. We will cooperate with police experts in the fight against drug trafficking.

We must all join in an effective international solidarity with our Caribbean brothers so seriously affected by the hurricane season.

We need the total commitment of the international community in the struggle against terrorism in Colombia. The terrorism in one country feeds and strengthens terrorist networks throughout the world. The widows and orphans of violence will ask why we pay so

much importance to terrorism in other parts of the world, and so little to the terrorism that besets Colombia.

I make this appeal to you from the soul of our profound democratic conviction. It is difficult to find a country facing the challenge of terrorism, while simultaneously strengthening its democracy.

Due to our democratic security policy, today Colombia offer effective guarantees for the exercise of political pluralism.

Our institutions combat terrorism with the unflinching political will of the Government. They do so with courage, unselfishness and transparency. A dirty war has no place in our policies.

A democratic State has the right to ask the world that, instead of clamouring for a lopsided agreement with terrorism, it should demand that the terrorists return their kidnap victims.

We ask the world for more decisive and more effective support if it is extended, the violent groups will have no option but to abandon terrorism and to accept peace.

With the people of Colombia, its democratic institutions and the international community united, we can make Colombia an example of the capacity to defeat terrorism and to observe human rights; and we can make Colombia an example of the capacity to defeat terrorism and of the will to build social justice.

We will expel terror with the help of our legitimate institutions and of a community based on solidarity and justice, with opportunities for its poorest members.