

Colombia: On a Path to Peace, Justice and Prosperity

Seven years ago, Colombia was nearly a failing state. Violence was rampant, investors were fleeing the country, and economic activity was plummeting. Since then, Colombia and the United States have worked together to combat violence and instability. Together we have made extraordinary strides in a few short years. U.S. assistance and tariff preferences under the Andean Trade Preference Act have been key elements of our joint strategy to promote peace, justice and prosperity. Examples of progress include:

PEACE

- **Peace Process:** In 2005, the Government of Colombia enacted the Justice and Peace Law, setting the rules under which paramilitary members would demobilize and be brought to justice. The process is working. Over 31,000 members from 35 paramilitary groups - principally from the AUC (United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia) - have collectively demobilized as part of the Justice and Peace Process. In addition, in response to the Colombian government's efforts to defeat the illegal armed groups operating within its borders, since 2002 more than 9,400 members of the far left insurgent groups FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and ELN (National Liberation Army) have chosen to individually demobilize, leaving their units and turning themselves in to Colombian authorities.
- **Steep Decline in Violence:** Through Plan Colombia, the Colombian Government stepped up its efforts to enhance territorial control and reduce violence throughout the country. As a result, since 2000, the security situation has improved significantly, with kidnappings down by 76 percent, terror attacks by 61 percent, and homicides by 40 percent (saving an estimated 40,000 lives over the last five years). Violence against trade unionists, among other groups, has dropped significantly.
- **Protection Programs:** In 1999, the Colombian government instituted new programs to provide protection to roughly 10,000 members of vulnerable groups. The largest of these programs is run by the Ministry of Interior and Justice and provides protection to almost 7,000 individuals, including over 1,300 trade unionists.
- **Expanded Police Presence:** As part of its effort to bring security and stability to all of its territory, Colombia has established a police presence in each of its 1,099 municipalities. Increased police presence has secured 187 primary and secondary roads throughout the country, freeing Colombians to use these roads without fear of attack. As a result, traffic along these roads has doubled since 2002, and commerce is flowing between areas that were once virtually cut off due to violence. To combat new criminal groups, the Colombian government has established 108 new rural police stations, staffed with over 4,000 new officers.
- **Increased State Presence:** Increased security has led to real changes in people's lives. Once forced to govern from afar due to fear, mayors have returned to their communities and are working with the national government to provide state services. Colombia is once again providing judicial, community, health and education services in many areas where it was once too dangerous to do so.
- **Containing Narcotics Trafficking:** The Colombian government is continuing to battle narcotrafficking, which provides the funding base for illegal armed groups. The combination of eradication and interdiction has taken 500 metric tons of cocaine off the market in 2006 alone, depriving terrorist groups of \$850 million in funds to buy arms and mount attacks.

JUSTICE

- **Paramilitary Ties Investigated and Prosecuted:** To reduce impunity the Colombian government is supporting extensive investigations and prosecutions of legislators, government officials and military officers with alleged paramilitary ties.
- **AUC Leaders Under Arrest:** Over 50 former paramilitary leaders are incarcerated in maximum security jails, including 19 senior leaders. The remaining senior leaders, who refused to surrender, are being sought by Colombian authorities. Former paramilitaries that commit new crimes stand to lose their right to reduced sentences under the Justice and Peace Law.
- **No Amnesty:** In comparison to other peace processes from Guatemala to South Africa, Colombia's process offers reduced sentences, but no amnesty, and significant reparations must be paid to victims by perpetrators. The government is prosecuting all former paramilitary members accused of serious crimes. If convicted, they will serve sentences of up to six to eight years.

- **Combating Impunity:** In Colombia, progress on investigation and prosecution of cases was hampered by an overburdened, outmoded inquisitorial judicial system. The country is now transitioning to a new accusatory criminal justice system. Where the system is in place, criminal cases move from arrest to verdict in months instead of years, and conviction rates have increased from 3 percent to 80 percent. To combat impunity in cases of violence against trade unionists, an independent special prosecutor's unit with a budget of \$1.5 million was established in late 2006 to rapidly investigate and prosecute 204 such priority homicide cases (identified in cooperation with Colombia's trade unions and the International Labor Organization).
- **Extensive Cooperation on Extradition:** Colombia has extradited over 450 narcotics traffickers and terrorists to the United States in the past five years, an exceptional number by any standard. Extraditions in 2007 are at a record pace.

PROSPERITY

- **Economic Growth:** Growth has averaged 5.2% annually since 2002, reaching 8 percent in the first quarter of 2007 (the highest in Colombian history).
- **Poverty Reduction:** Poverty declined from 60% in 2000 to 45% in 2006.
- **Trade Growth:** Colombia's exports to the United States grew 48% from 2000 to 2006, while U.S. exports to Colombia grew 88.5%.

While significant challenges remain, the Colombian government and people are making progress toward peace, justice and prosperity and they are committed to doing more.

For more information, visit the Department of State's FTAs webpage located under Bilateral Trade Affairs at www.state.gov/e/eeb/tpp/c22883.htm