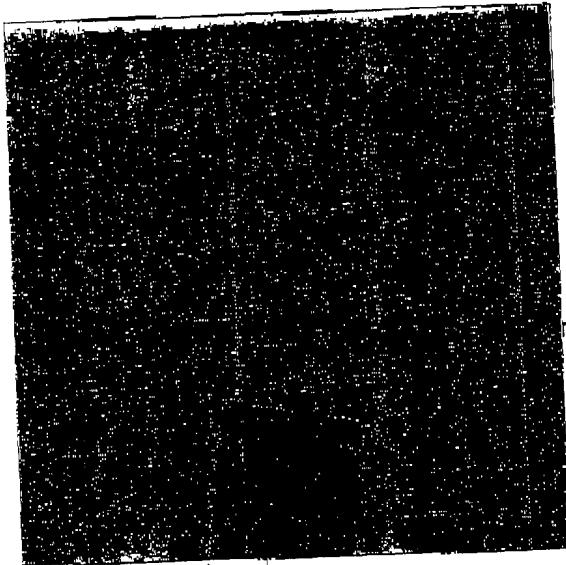


Alvaro Uribe Vélez
Presidente de la República de Colombia

gotá, D.C., September 14, 2006



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I would like to thank you for the deep and permanent interest that as prominent members of the U.S. Congress you have in Colombia and its people. As I begin the second term of my presidency, I would like to take this opportunity to provide a vision of what my government considers the immediate needs of Plan Colombia and the generous assistance that the United States provides to my country on the basis of the principle of shared responsibility on the fight against drug trafficking and the violence it generates. I will first focus on security and the war on drug trafficking and then on the important consequences of Plan Colombia both on economic growth and social investment.

First, let me clarify my request to President George W. Bush during my visit of June 13. Colombia is in need of new helicopters, not to increase aerial fumigation efforts, but to be able to consolidate the security gains we have achieved since the onset of Plan Colombia. If we want to give the peace process with the AUC the best opportunity to succeed, we need to ensure that our armed forces and police are able to secure those areas where these groups have been demobilized, so that neither the FARC nor other terrorist or criminal groups will

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move in and fill the vacuum. We also need to guarantee that we capture those who continue to engage in criminal activity. This request is well grounded in the joint assessment of the Colombian Ministry of Defense and the U.S. military group in Colombia, which have repeatedly determined that improved mobility remains the most pressing need for our police and military efforts to achieve democratic security.

Colombia has purchased eight new Black Hawk helicopters for this purpose, but unfortunately their delivery has been delayed as a result of the war in Iraq. However, even when we do receive these helicopters they will be insufficient in number, because of the enormous challenges created by Colombia's scope and geography. This makes improved air mobility a very pressing issue, as I discussed with both President Bush and several Members of Congress with whom I met with in Washington on June 13.

I am confident you agree with me that providing democratic security for all Colombians is a necessity and with Plan Colombia we have achieved important steps towards this goal. Today, the Colombian National Police is present in every single municipality all across Colombia. But most importantly, our Army is the most highly respected public institution in Colombia, with 76% popular support. This attests to both its increased professionalism as well as its commitment to democracy and the protection of all Colombians. Through these efforts, we have been able to reduce homicides by 33%, kidnappings by 86% and massacres by 71% over the past four years.

Plan Colombia has been indispensable in providing security to enhance the rule of law and guarantee the protection of human rights and civil liberties. It has been the cornerstone of our fight against the illegal drug trade, which with its huge

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profits aims to destabilize our democracy. Although we have not yet succeeded in realizing all our goals, we have come a long way since the days when narco-terrorist organizations were overtly intimidating the population, and preventing publicly-elected officials from providing citizens with their democratic rights.

I also want to take this opportunity to place in context our aerial fumigation program. Our total investment in Plan Colombia between 2000 and 2005 was US\$10.732 billion. Of these resources, US\$6.950 billion (or 64.8%) were Colombian resources, while US\$3.782 billion (35.2%) has been provided by the United States. The combined spending to date has been invested as follows:

- 26.57% for the strengthening of democratic institutions,
- 57.45% for the fight against illegal drugs and organized crime, and
- 15.98% for economic and social revitalization.

These figures do not take into account the economic benefit of trade and tariff preferences provided by the U.S. under the ATPDEA, which has helped to generate thousands of jobs. For example, just in the garment industries, exports from Colombia grew from 300 million to 1 billion dollars, with the ATPDEA preferences providing a crucial competitive edge to compete with China.

A significant portion of the \$6 billion invested in fighting narco-terrorist organizations has been utilized to strengthen our armed forces and national police. As I have noted, most of these funds originate from the Colombian budget, with the U.S. providing crucial infrastructure, technology support and training. The resulting substantial increase in size of our army and police, as well as training for our public forces, has enabled us to expand State's institutions and services to remote

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regions of the country, where they had been absent for years. This is a process that takes time, but is the essence of the Democratic Security Policy we have been implementing.

The strengthening of our public forces is the cornerstone in the fight against criminal organizations in Colombia. But the consolidation of security gains depends on our ability to maintain a high level of pressure on drug traffickers. That is why, in addition to a stronger army and police, we also need to continue effective programs for eradication, interdiction and extradition. In addition to alternative development and social spending in drug producing areas, it is the combination of these four policies – not just aerial spraying – that encompasses our comprehensive anti-narcotics strategy.

Eradication has served to reverse the exponential growth of coca, from 32,000 to 168,000 hectares, that occurred in Colombia from 1994 until the start of Plan Colombia. Interdiction has broken the air bridge which trafficking cartels managed to establish between Colombia and the United States, greatly increasing their risk and transport costs. Finally, the more than 430 extraditions – the strongest extradition relationship between the U.S. and any other country in the world – has allowed us to weaken the power of the cartels. It has sent a strong message and created an enforcement mechanism for crime to be punished and drug traffickers to be brought to justice.

As you accurately stated in your letter, we need to “invest more heavily in alternative development programs in rural areas,” and “address the needs of Colombian farmers by creating the infrastructure for sustainable economic growth in rural areas.” I assure you these are our priorities. We are seeking to establish an environment in which security and investment in rural communities go hand in

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hand, reinforcing each other. Because of the progress made in security to date, we are today enjoying an improved economic environment, in which investment is returning to Colombia's rural areas.

As an example, agricultural production in the country has increased by 16 percent since the onset of Plan Colombia. New crops, specifically aimed at coca-growing areas, are creating badly-needed jobs and providing income for farmers who have given up growing coca. Poverty in the rural areas has fallen by 7 percent since the start of Plan Colombia.

Essential government services, such as education, have reached even the most remote rural villages in Colombia. Mandatory primary and secondary education has surpassed 90 percent coverage. Only 15 years ago, it was accessible to only 50 percent of children in our country. My goal is that during the next four years we will reach 100 percent.

We have also created under Plan Colombia a social safety net program called *Families in Action*, designed to help the poorest families by giving mothers a direct cash subsidy – as long as they prove their children remain in school and visit a health center regularly. This program has helped 500,000 families and will reach 1 million families over the next four years.

Unfortunately, we know there are no magic or instant solutions. But our results certainly indicate we are moving, fast, in the right direction. To advance on this path to progress, it is necessary to increase our budget, which in turn, will enable us to invest more in rural areas and strengthen the economy, creating more jobs. The ATPA and, subsequently, ATPDEA preferences began an impressive transformation in high labor-intensive agricultural crops and industries. This

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convinces us that the Colombia-U.S. Free Trade Agreement, when ratified and implemented, will be crucial to obtaining the goals I have just outlined. For all Colombians, the FTA will serve as the more effective program of alternative development. In addition, strengthening our budget will help Colombia increase public resources in order to sustain the long-term fight against drugs and violence.

An additional component of this comprehensive strategy is that, given the improved security conditions in the country which are the result of the combined application of Plan Colombia, the Democratic Security Policy and ATPDEA, we plan to redouble our efforts in two areas closely inter-related, and to which my government assigns the highest importance: (1) improvements in the administration of justice, and (2) promotion and protection of human rights.

In the area of justice, with the help of the U.S. Office of the Attorney General, our entire system of criminal justice is undergoing a profound and historic transformation – moving from an inquisitorial to an accusatory system. This is designed to reduce impunity and increase speed and efficiency in all judicial processes. This new system is already producing excellent results in the central region of the country. Over the next four years, this important reform will be expanded to include the rest of the country. The revamping of our judicial system has required tremendous financial resources, resulting in the four-fold increase of our justice system budget since 1990.

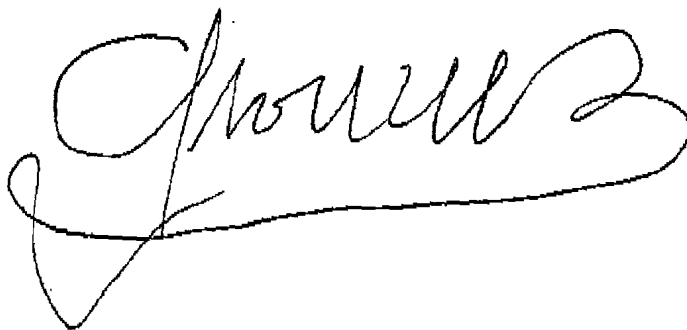
With respect to human rights, we will continue our efforts to provide specialized training for members of the armed forces and police, strengthening systems for protection of human rights. We are providing a renewed importance to on-going investigations. In this context, I would like to acknowledge once again the important role that human rights proponents, including many non-governmental

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organizations (NGOs), contribute in Colombia. They reinforce in a very significant way actions undertaken by the Government and they engage in a permanent and constructive dialogue with all stakeholders in our society.

As I have admitted time and again, this is not enough and much remains to be done. We are determined to stay the course in this comprehensive strategy and increase the coverage of social, judicial and human rights programs. But at the same time, I believe it is crucial that we all acknowledge that, due to the very nature of the criminal activity we are confronting, it is imperative that Plan Colombia include continued support for security. It is virtually impossible to adequately serve the population, guarantee the provision of human rights, and provide alternative development to areas where security conditions are weak and where the presence of narco-terrorist organizations endangers on a permanent basis the safety and well-being of the civilian population.

Let me thank you once again for your permanent interest in our problems and for your good intentions towards the welfare of my nation and my people.

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to be 'Alvaro Uribe Vélez'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal stroke at the bottom.