

# Center for American Progress



## **SPECIAL PRESENTATION**

**“COLOMBIA AND THE UNITED STATES AT A  
CROSSROADS: A CONVERSATION WITH  
PRESIDENT ALVARO URIBE.”**

**INTRODUCTION BY:  
JOHN PODESTA, PRESIDENT AND CEO,  
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MR. JOHN PODESTA: Thank you all for coming. I'm John Podesta. I'm the president of the Center for American Progress, and on behalf of the Center it's a pleasure to welcome you to today's event with His Excellency Alvaro Uribe, president of Colombia. The president had – I was describing in the elevator ride on the way up here what we used to call when I worked in President Clinton's White House an OTR – an off-the-record. We started our debate out on the sidewalk and we're going to continue it here this afternoon, and we welcome – Mr. President, thank you for being here.

I would also like to take a moment to welcome some of our Colombian guests, the Foreign Minister Luis Fernando Araujo is here; Commerce, Industry and Tourism Minister Luis Plata; Social Protection Minister Diego Palacio, and Ambassador Carolina Barco, members of the Colombian legislature, and many of our distinguished Colombian guests. Welcome to the Center for American Progress.

At the Center, we recognize that a growing Latino population in the United States in the ever increasing interconnections with our regional neighbors will profoundly affect the future of the United States. For that reason, we launched the Americas Project last year under the direction of my colleague, Dan Restrepo. Through this initiative, the Center has focused on the relationship of the United States with and place in the Americas, and has tried to explore and understand those relationships and their implications for progressive policy at home and abroad.

In the case of Colombia, the strategic importance of its relation to the United States is multifaceted. The United States and Colombia are deeply interconnected in many good ways and in some bad. We share important economic connections: Colombia's the fifth largest economy in Latin America, the two-way trade between our countries has exceeded \$14 billion in 2005. Currently, Colombia is the second largest agricultural market for the United States in Latin America and is one of the top 15 exporters of oil to the United States. And as we are all aware, the United States Congress currently has before it, or will shortly, the U.S.-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement. I'm certain we'll hear more about that from President Uribe in a moment.

Colombia is also of strategic importance for security reasons, the most visible of which is the persistent trafficking in drugs and the illegal armed groups involved in it. Illegal drugs, violence, and contraband affect our homeland security and pose a serious threat to Colombia's national security as well as our own. These phenomena present challenges that require comprehensive responses from both our countries. With the Trade Promotion Agreement and next year's Colombia assistance package before it, the United States Congress faces important decisions about the future course of the relationship between our countries. Many in Congress have strong feelings about these matters. They should be debated seriously and respectfully. I know that the president met with President Bush this morning. He's meeting with leaders of Congress. I believe tomorrow a meeting with our new speaker, Nancy Pelosi.

Recent developments in Colombia have led to questions about what is the most prudent path forward. It is our hope that today's event will allow us gathered here to exchange views and candid opinions on this important question. The United States and Colombia, of course, have stood at a crossroads before. I had the privilege of accompanying President Clinton, Speaker Hastert, and a bipartisan delegation to Cartagena in August of 2000 to make the case for Plan Colombia, that initiative fashioned and championed by President Uribe's predecessor.

And our administration understood that the response to Colombia's many challenges had to be multifaceted. It required lending assistance to the Colombian government to reassert control over its territory, but it did not end there. Vital to that vision was the understanding that combating Colombia's challenges required addressing issues of social and economic development and Colombia revitalizing its governing institutions.

It's undeniable that with that assistance Colombia has made significant strides towards increased stability in the past six years. Colombia's cities are more peaceful; the economy is growing briskly. Serious work remains, however, to bring about the lasting stability which we all hope to see in Colombia. For example, the levels of politically motivated violence, including the unsolved murders of union leaders and organizers, are simply unacceptable. Much more work remains to examine the past, to stabilize the present, and build a future of lasting peace, reconciliation and justice. Such an outcome is certainly in Colombia's interest, but it's in the U.S.'s own interest as well. As a longstanding ally of the United States in the Andean region, it is in our best interest to see Colombia succeed and thrive as a stable, democratic nation. At a time when U.S. alliances are strained globally, it's important that we work to maintain durable alliances that help advance mutual interests.

In the spirit of fostering open communication and collaboration with the Americas, we are pleased to have President Uribe with us here today. Hopefully, we can speak frankly about the challenges that lie ahead. After his address, my colleague, Mr. Restrepo will do some Q and A with him, and then we'll open it up to questions from you.

With that, please help me welcome His Excellency President Alvaro Uribe.

(Applause.)

MR. DAN RESTREPO: As the whole day has been slightly improvised, we've decided to just start with the conversation, and I was downstairs a moment ago and there was a lively debate on the street in front of the Center for American Progress, and I hope our debate here and our discussion here will be every bit as lively, albeit slightly more structured, than the conversation you had downstairs. (Laughs.)

And in the comments – I’ve heard you say it before when confronted with the allegations that you’re being confronted with, you repeatedly say you’ve committed no crimes, but you have made mistakes. What are those mistakes that you’re thinking of?

PRESIDENT ALVARO URIBE: Thank you very much. I appreciate this opportunity. Let me ask you to invite three people; I said to the people protesting at the ground level that I want to invite them to come here and to ask their questions, and one of them in a very constructive way said to me that they are ready to send three people here as their representatives and I am ready to take their comments. Please, if you could send some envoy – and we are here plenty of ambassadors – invite three of them to come here. I am ready.

Mistakes, maybe. I have worked in politics, I was elected city councilor when I was 21 years, and will be 55 in July, and I have worked all my life in politics. My wife was asked sometime, “When will Alvaro begin campaigning?” And her answer was, “Alvaro never has stopped campaigning.” (Laughs.)

In my long political life, in a country with problems with the complexity of Colombia, it is possible that I have made many mistakes, but we have to establish the difference between mistakes and crimes. This is the reason I referred to mistakes. Maybe. I may have made many mistakes. I was senator for eight years. I was elected governor in my province in very difficult times, and I was there for – the term at that time was a three-year term, and I will complete five years in August as president of Colombia. When I mention mistakes, it’s to establish the difference between mistakes and crimes.

The only way I have to upset you for the time you lost and I want discussing at the ground level is by giving you the opportunity to ask as many questions as you consider; thus, I will omit long speeches.

MR. RESTREPO: I’m going to continue with the questions and I’m going to get to the crowd. Here at the Center for American Progress, our notion of how the United States should conduct its national security policy is something we call integrated power: the use of all of the powers at the disposal of the United States government, be they military, diplomatic, economic – along the line.

Plan Colombia as it was originally conceived was very much in keeping with the spirit of integrated power. As it has been implemented, at least from the perspective of the United States funding, it fails the test. We’ve spent an overabundance of money on military and police assistance, and the question I think a lot of people in this room and a lot of people that you’re going to be speaking with over the next couple of days have, why shouldn’t U.S. assistance to Colombia reflect our values that say that the major piece of assistance from the United States to our partner and neighbors in the Americas shouldn’t be military and police, but also should include significant amounts of social and economic and institution-building support?

PRES. URIBE: We do not fail. We have not won yet, but we are winning. You have to ask yourself this question: what could have happened in Colombia in the absence of Plan Colombia? Let me give you some numbers. When Plan Colombia began, the unemployment rate in my country was around 20 percent in the year 2000. Now it is around 11 or 12 – very high still, but the trend is positive. When my administration began two years after Plan Colombia was initiated, Colombia had 68 homicides for every 100,000 inhabitants; last year 38. By that time, 3,000 cases of kidnapping; last year less than 300.

Last year I was very concerned because the U.S.A. administration in the new measures on illicit crops areas, they show that although from the year 2000 to the year 2004 we saw a decrease, in the year 2005 we saw a rebirth. I ask why? We have made a great effort. And the answer was we have measured – we have included areas that we didn't measure in the year 2000.

I have received new official reports from the United Nations. I received it two weeks ago, and they say that by year 2006, Colombia had a decrease of 12 percent in plantations and of 20 percent in production. We have made a great effort. In the last three years, we have introduced manual eradication, not to replace spraying, but to add to spraying. In the year '05, we got 32,000 hectares by manual eradication. Last year, 43,000, and this year we expect to complete 50,000 hectares of manual eradication.

Trade union leaders – if you consolidate trade union leaders and state teachers, you see that Colombia has no less than 1,200,000. Before my administration, there were years in which 256 were killed; last year around 55. The year '05 –

PROTESTERS: (Yelling.)

MR. RESTREPO: I'm going to ask you all to please sit down.

PRES. URIBE: No, no. Be patient. Be patient. No, no. Let them speak. Let them speak. Please, please.

PROTESTERS: (Yelling “Colombia's not for sale!”)

PRES. URIBE: *No la retiren por favor, señor. No la retire por favor. Dejela que venga.*

MR. RESTREPO: Let's wait – we're going to get to questioning and answering in a second. Let's –

PRES. URIBE: Yes, but with order. Democracy needs order, and I am ready to ask their questions. It is very important in Colombia to pass from violence to political debate, and this is the reason I wanted to discuss at the ground level with the protesters.

Last year, I am sad because we saw an interruption of that good trend in protecting effectively trade union leaders and estate teachers. However, if you compare last year with the year 2002, that trend is still very positive. This year so far we have had one case of trade union assassinations, six teachers. Last week in el Cauca province, there were three teachers assassinated by FARC. We have recovered at some degree the law and order in the country, but we need to do much more in order to win.

Poverty: poverty reaches 60 percent. The last measure indicated that we had 45. This is still very high. By the year 2010 at the end of my administration, we are working to reduce poverty to be not over 35 in order for my successors to be able to meet the long-term goal. In a democratic debate, we have said in our country to have poverty not over 15 percent by the year 2019.

We have three main goals in our administration: to consolidate security, to create more and more confidence in Colombia for investors, and to fulfill our social goals even before that the (light?) of the social Millennium Goals.

It is very important – exciting – to speak about our social policy. For instance, as I have stated here in the city, I have fallen in love with microlending. When my administration began – my first term began, I said we need to provide 1.8 million Colombian families with microlending. It seemed impossible, but we fulfilled that goal. Now we have set a new one: to provide 5 million poor Colombian families with microlending. So far we have completed 900,000 and we will do our best to work the hard as we can at day and at night to fulfill the same.

We are working on education – basic, secondary, vocational training, university, on health, on supporting with state subsidies the poorest families for them to have the possibility to send their children to schools and to feed – and to feed them. We have passed from 220,000 families in this program, and in August we are going to reach 1.5 million.

My country has suffered a lot of problems, but we are working with all the optimism, with all the patriotism, with all the love for our people and for our land to overcome these problems.

MR. RESTREPO: And I understand your desire to hear from the audience, and I'm going to turn it over to the audience in just a moment. I'd be remiss as the son of a man who was born in Medellin 22 years before you were born in Medellin, and I spent a lot of time in Colombia – family has suffered through the violence and the kidnappings and the necessity of fleeing the country. And I was struck by your comment of the necessity in Colombia to replace violence with political debate. And one of the things when viewed from Washington and viewed, I think, from the outside that is striking about the political debate in Colombia at the moment is the lack of talk of reconciliation – a country that is so deeply divided and has had generations of violence.

And I'm also struck by the rhetoric that is used. It has been widely publicized that you've referred to your political opponents at various points in times as terrorists, as terrorists in suits, and I wonder what message that sends to the groups that you're having discussions with at the moment, that your government is in discussion with ELN. If people who are part of an illegal armed group 20 years ago and who've become part of the political process of Colombia are now regularly called out by the president of the republic in public as terrorists –

PRES. URIBE: Not all of them.

MR. RESTREPO: Not all of them, but some of them, does that send a message of reconciliation?

PRES. URIBE: And here I won't say that because one principle I live with it is to keep with these debates in Colombia: when I leave the country and when I have to speak before international audiences, I give answers regarding my accountability. I try not to refer to my critics. Let me say that.

Our government is the first one in Colombia to having begun striking paramilitary groups. I have the record. The only way I have to confront my opponents is by force. During my administration, more than 1,700 paramilitary members have been shot dead by the institutional forces. After the demobilization, over 400 who tried to rearm have been shot down by the institutional forces. After the peace process, more than 800 who tried to rearm have been put in jail.

Now, the vast majority of leaders of this organization have submitted to the law and they are in jail. And they will have the benefit of reduced sentences, but for first time Colombia has a law of peace. That requires confession, reparation, and justice. When I began my presidency and long before here and Europe, in my country in South America, I was accused of being a paramilitary. I have borne with me this debate since the day almost 20 years ago I said to my fellow country citizens, we need to defeat FARC. I knew FARC when I was a university student. I went to the public university and I sustained a permanent debate with them and I knew them as Marxist guerillas, and I have seen them converted into sheer terrorists, into sheer narcotraffickers, into mercenaries. And I remember the day when I said we have to defeat FARC. Since that day I have been accused of being paramilitary.

I was a member of Congress when we approved the peace process with M-19. We have to approve a second law to give them what we call *reindulto*, a second pardon. And I was one of the advocates of this law and I was very delighted to do so.

When my father was killed months after I was the president of the Peace Commission in my province set by President Belisario Betancur, at that moment I have not hated; I discussed. I like to live in debate, but I do not promote hate. With the law, justice, and peace many people came here and went to Europe: Uribe wants to legalize paramilitaries. Therefore, I had to explain the difference between the new law and the

old ones. The old ones gave amnesty and gave pardon to all kind of atrocities. The new one does not. The old ones didn't require reparation; the new one requires reparation for the victims. The old ones allowed them to go from atrocities to Congress; the new one never. And this comparison is very important for the national and international community to realize that, yes, we are looking for peace, but in a balance between peace, justice, and reparation.

And this comparison is not important only to compare the present with the past, but to set the standard for the future, because one problem I have found in many debates is that some people of my critics – they want no peace with the paramilitaries, but complete impunity with guerillas. And I have stated, we cannot establish the difference between atrocities committed by guerillas with atrocities committed by paramilitaries. We have to judge them with the same standards.

Of course, the quote you have said it is true. Is true. I have said it there in Colombia, but please, one question. Go to Colombia and ask: when the opposition has had more effective protection than now? Look at the free elections that I have presided as president. Please. Before my administration, remember the killing of Patriotic Union. When I was governor, the two deputies in my province of Patriotic Union were protected effectively by the governorship. They live in Colombia.

Please, when you think in the problem with Patriotic Union before my administration, there were two great mistakes. Some members of Patriotic Union combine all forms of struggle. Marxist guerrillas taught Colombians to combine all forms of the struggles. They penetrated the union movement, they penetrated the students, they penetrated politics. Marxist guerrillas, FARC guerrillas generated paramilitaries and taught paramilitaries to combine all forms of the struggles. Some members of Patriotic Union combined all forms of the struggle.

And the second mistake was the lack of protection by the Colombian state. My government has protected them effectively. Look at the elections of last year. All the candidates were effectively protected. The only on which claims I am, because in south of the country FARC impeded my constituency to come to vote for me and we couldn't overcome this problem at that time, but for my competitors there plenty of guarantees. I have said, you have all the guarantees, but I have the guarantee to debate politically.

MR. RESTREPO: Mr. President, you say you welcome debate, and I imagine we're about to start one in the room. Allow me to call on the first person and then I will get out of your have and let you have a free and open discussion in the room. I'm going to go with Mark. And folks, actually before Mark says anything, to the extent that people ask questions, please make them questions, not dialogues in the form of a question, and identify yourself and whatever organization you are representing. Thank you very much.

Q: Mr. President, I'm Mark Schneider with the International Crisis Group and I'd like to ask you a question in relation directly to the issue of the paramilitary. You just indicated the importance of the Justice and Peace Law in terms of ensuring some degree



of justice for those who – the paramilitary leaders, more than 2,600 who have reduced sentence. In that regard, wasn't it the Constitutional Court that changed the initial draft that was approved by the Congress to require full confessions, to require that all illegal assets be made available and be seized before, in order to ensure that they did not get the benefits and did not provide the information and still receive the benefits?

And in that regard, the attorney general's indicated that he only has 20 prosecutorial teams available to carry out these investigations and only 14 to carry out the investigations of the labor leaders assassinated. So I'm curious whether you are going to ask your members of Congress to approve increased funding – doubling or tripling the number of attorneys that he would have available to carry out these massive requirements which are the only assurance that your country will have that the law will be enforced to its fullest, and perhaps will be successful and seeing an end to paramilitarism in Colombia, which also raises the question about the new groups, the Rapadas (ph) if you will –

PRES. URIBE: Okay. Three points, new groups, the law and the number of prosecutors. The law I accept. The law was approved by the Constitutional Court. It is very important for the Colombian state as a whole. It is very important for you to consider how important is our democracy that we have independent branches. Second, confessing. The initial text did require confession, but gave the indicted the opportunity to say whether or not this crime you are blamed for you were the perpetrator. The initial law said if he or she lies, he or she will lose the benefit. If he or she does not cooperate with the justice, he or she will lose the benefit. The Constitutional Court said emphatically they need to confess all the crimes, but please consider that the initial text did not want to hide crimes.

What is the other point you made about the changes introduced by the Constitutional Court to the law of justice and peace?

Q: The issue of illegal assets.

PRES. URIBE: Illegal assets. Okay. The initial text said those owning illegal assets must hand out these illegal assets to repay the victims. Illegal assets. What was my interpretation? In Colombia, the criminal action does not exclude the civil action. And I said if the illegal assets are not enough to pay the reparation, through the civil action they will be obliged to hand out the legal assets to complete the reparation. I am trying to be the less subjective I can.

What did the Constitutional Court? The Constitutional Court has stated: any kind of wealth has to be dedicated to repay the victims. In the initial text, we thought the result was going to be the same through two actions: the criminal action and the civil action. Please consider the difference between the initial text and the previous laws my country had applied before. I accept that the initial text was improved by the Constitutional Court, but when you compare the initial text with previous laws, you see in

the initial text the three points: looking for truth; the need of reparation; and third, no amnesty, no pardon for atrocities. It was very important – very important.

And consider it: what Colombia is going to do with guerrillas, ELN says we need amnesty and pardon for all kinds of atrocities. FARC says we cannot accept the legal courts of Colombia because we don't recognize the Colombian state. Be prepared, here and everywhere, for the futile peace process, because we need to apply the same standards to everyone. And consider this – consider this: the initial text approved by Congress did not lift the ban for those responsible of crimes different than non-guilty homicide or political crimes – didn't lift the prohibition, the ban for them to go to Congress. In the past, they came from atrocities to Congress.

The other point you made there are only 20 prosecutors. Please, first I accept that we need to enlarge the number of prosecutors, but don't forget the efforts we have made. First, we introduced the accusatory system. We needed a constitutional amendment. Second, we approved the codes to implement the accusatory system. Third, we have enlarged the judiciary a lot in order to be capable to implement the accusatory system. Last year alone for the implementation of the accusatory system we have spent \$70 million in addition to the ordinary budget. And don't forget, for the first time this year the Supreme Court of Justice has its own body of investigation supported by new budget approved by my government. We need to do much more of course, and we are ready. And don't forget all the fiscal constraints Colombia has suffered. We still have a very high fiscal deficit, a very high rate of indebtedness.

What was the third point you made?

Q: (Off mike.)

PRES. URIBE: Oh, no, no. We have seen the demobilization of over 30,000 paramilitaries and we are close to 10,000 guerrillas demobilized in my government. It is very important. And when I refer to the demobilization of guerrillas, I find in some international commentators that this is a farce. I would like that they go to Colombia and speak with the demobilized guerrillas and ask them about this supposed farce. We have demobilized near 10,000. Okay? Rearmed – there has been some degree of recidivism, I accept. The police say that new groups are made up of 1,080 people. We have through the police and through the Army shot dead over 400 and we have brought to jail over 800.

The only way to avoid these people to rearm, to avoid guerrillas to enlarge, to avoid new groups to appear is by the continuation of our policy of democratic security. Everywhere where new groups try to appear or where demobilized people try to reoccur in crimes, our institutional forces are after them with all the determination. Please look at the results. In the last two weeks, two very important ringleaders who were fugitive have been arrested. One is known with the surname – with name of H.H and other is known with the name of Salomon (ph). And they will be extradited to the United States.

And I was very shocked when I read in some page I received that here in the United States and in Europe some of my critics said that successes in our policy are due to the free press. Of course Colombia has free press. It is very important. It is very important, but they cannot forget that until my administration began, Colombia had not prosecuted, had not fought paramilitary groups and now I have with me the first report on how the new law is going on in its application. So far because of the new law, we have seen the clarification of 106 cases of homicides. It is very important. It's a very complex law. It isn't easy to be applied, but we are convinced and optimistic that with perseverance we will see the results.

Extradition: I am blamed because supposedly I have not extradited any important figure of the paramilitary organization. During my administration, I have signed orders to extradite more than 564 individuals, more than 512 to the United States. I ask you, is there a different country in the world with this record? And I have suspended the orders in five cases of paramilitary – five cases. One is Carlos Castaño, who is – the judges say he's dead. The others are Salvatore Mancuso, Murio Jorano (ph), another two – all members of the illegal self-defense groups. Please do the equation: 32 demobilize, five cases of suspended extradition. Those who have not submitted to the law, at the moment they are arrested by the government the government is ready to extradite them. And those who have the suspension of the extradition, the extradition has been suspended under strict conditions. If they violate the conditions, the government will proceed to send them to the United States.

MR. RESTREPO: Mr. President, as we continue to improvise, two things. For those who are wondering, we're going to go another half hour at least to kind of make up for some of our lost time. And the second is, although the people outside had more opportunity to ask you questions so far than the people inside, per your request we have three representatives from the group, and one of them I believe is going to now pose a question to you, and then I'll try getting to as many of the questions in the room as we possibly can. Thank you.

Q: Good afternoon. Thank you, Mr. Uribe, for inviting the three of us in and accepting our questions. I'm Heather Hanson from the U.S. Office on Colombia and I was chosen by the group along with Marino Cordoba of AFRODES and Jairo Valencia of the Colombia Human Rights Committee.

And I wanted to try to engage you in a dialogue that's directly about human rights issues. Here we read a lot of statistics by the Colombian government about homicide rates, and indeed the homicide rate has gone down, but a homicide, although always unfortunate, is only sometimes a human rights violation. And what we see in the most recent reports of the Inter-American Human Rights Commission and the United Nations High Commission on Human Rights is that abuses by the Colombian security forces are actually on the increase, and this includes during your first administration: 756 cases of extra-judicial executions that have been registered.

The Inter-American Commission says that the pressure placed on the armed forces to produce high body counts to show results in the war is contributing to these abuses against the civilian population, the majority of which are now being tried in military court instead of in the regular justice system in Colombia.

My specific question is: what steps is your administration willing to take to end these extrajudicial executions and to ensure that these cases that have already taken place do not remain in impunity? Of those 98 cases presented to the commission in the hearing in October, none of them have gotten a sentence, although many of them took place two to three years ago.

PRES. URIBE: The annual report made by the United Nations has been very critical to Colombia with the exception of this year. We do not measure human rights only on the basis of homicides. We measure it, too, on the basis of kidnapping, of effective protection to trade union leaders, to journalists, to mayors. It is very important. Don't forget that before my administration, Colombia had years in which 15 journalists were killed. This year we haven't had one single case. This year there has not been one single case of journalist killing.

It is very important to be highlighted that when my administration began, many journalists were threatened in many areas of the country through – by guerrillas or either by paramilitaries. Now they feel much freer. It is very important to highlight. The Army – my government is totally strict to punish violation of human rights, but my government cannot allow the destruction of our Army. In those cases in which we have had troops, without any doubt we have proceeded. Please recognize this.

Two weeks before the last presidential election, we had a massacre of policemen near Cali and my government made the decision to submit this case to the ordinary justice. I have supported the police and the Army the most I can. I could have made alliances with illicit groups to combat other illicit groups, but this is not the way I chose. The way I have chosen is the institutional one for democratic convictions, for our constitution, for my principles of Christianity, and for the new generation of Colombians.

Every time we have been in need to remove any official in the Army, in the police, we have done it. What I cannot accept is to destroy them. I went to the public university on one of the main tools used by terrorists is to discredit the Army, is to discredit the police, and I cannot be abided by this trick.

And I disagree with you with the number you bring. Fortunately, Colombia is a country open to international scrutiny. Remember the countries in Latin America: when their government fought terrorists, they suppressed freedoms, they fought dissent, and they closed their borders. They didn't allow the scrutiny from the international community. The case of Colombia is a different one. We are ready to move forward in human rights respect, but we cannot destroy our Army. What we need is to strengthen our Army and our police.

You know that my government does not hide the statistics. There is a very important chart in which you can see that the more we enlarge the Army, the more military operations are undertaken by our Army, the less the blames for human rights abuses. I believe that our policy on democratic security needs to be credible to become sustainable and to be credible needs effectiveness and transparency.

This morning, I brought to the table in Capitol Hill the case of the mayor of Bogotá, the case of the governor of El Valle del Cauca. My government not only protected them effectively when they ran as candidates, but my government has created a democratic landscape – horizon. We told the mayor and governors, regardless their political origins, for them to feel true governors and mayors in a democratic country. Remember, almost 400 mayors out of 1,098 were exiled from their towns at the moment my administration began. Now all of them are in their places, thanks to our policy on democratic security.

MR. RESTREPO: *Mucha gente lo ha solicitado.* Please continue.

Q: *Presidente, buenos días. Le tengo que hacer esta pregunta en ingles porque es para un canal internacional así que -*

Q: President, good morning. I have to ask you this question in English because it is for an international channel so -

PRES. URIBE: *Se la descuento de la entrevista del viernes.* (Laughs.)

PRES URIBE: I'll discount it from Friday's interview. (Laughs.)

Q: You're going to meet with congressmen these days. Will you address the issue of American multinational companies being accused of making payments to paramilitary groups for the killings of trade unionists? And will you possibly ask for the extradition of heads of these companies who have done so?

PRES. URIBE: We don't replace the justice. We respect justice in Colombia and abroad. We need to wait for justice decisions. And please consider: former Marxist guerrillas converted into terrorist groups were the cause of the paramilitaries. Don't forget FARC is still alive. We have weakened FARC, but (unintelligible) is still alive. Don't forget that Colombians during three decades were without governmental protection against terrorist groups, and don't forget it is – an easy way for many wanting to stop our policy of security, the way is to discredit institutions, is to discredit employers, is to discredit this policy that has been a very effective policy.

We respect the decisions made by the justice. In Colombia we have supported the most we can our justice, but we defend in every place the right of my fellow country citizens to get Colombia rid of terrorist groups. I want to dedicate all my life until the final day of my life to the cause of getting Colombia rid of terrorist groups. And I am not

guilty for the reason that many people – no, not many – dislike this determination. We have to continue in the fight.

MR. RESTREPO: Adam?

Q: Mr. President, I'm Adam Isacson from the Center for International Policy, and I'd like to give you another chance to answer Heather Hanson's question. She presented you some data about extrajudicial executions, which even the UN high commissioner for human rights says is increasing – allegations and reports of that are increasing in the Army. And I thought I heard you respond that such allegations are the work of terrorists trying to weaken the Army, and I would like to hear you actually say that you are committed to actually investigating these cases and seeing them brought to justice.

PRES. URIBE: Of course, of course. Any case of extrajudicial execution or judicial execution, because in Colombia we have not that penalty. In Colombia we do not allow legal execution. Any case has to be investigated and the decision of my government is to support the justice to do it. And this is one of the reasons we have made decisions to put into the hands of the ordinary justice some investigations.

If you bring a fair case, my government makes all the decisions. Don't forget the number of members of the armed forces that have been removed by my government decisions, but please understand: I cannot weaken our institutional forces. The only way for Colombia to live in democracy under the constitution in permanent democratic debate is through the strengthening of our institutional forces.

MR. RESTREPO: Paige, we're going to go over here. If you could wait for the microphone for a moment, please.

Q: *Mas de treinta dirigentes políticos detenidos...*

MR. RESTREPO: One moment. For those – we're not going to translate the question and answer. I'm hoping most of the people in the room are going to be able to follow the question and answer in Spanish. The transcript that will be available will have the answer both in Spanish and in English.

Q: He made this point. I want to ask him who is him.

MR. RESTREPO: Yes. Absolutely. You need to identify yourself please.

PRES. URIBE: No, no, no. Don't do it. Don't do it.

(Cross talk.)

Q: *Mi nombre es Gerardo Cajamarca estoy asilado político aquí*

Q: My name is Gerardo Cajamarca and I am politically exiled here.

PRES. URIBE: *¿Cuanto hace que estas asilado?*

PRES URIBE: How long have you been exiled?

MR. CAJAMARCA: *Hace tres años salí del país perseguido -*

MR. CAJAMARCA: I left the country three years ago persecuted -

PRES. URIBE: *¿De donde viniste?*

PRES URIBE: Where did you come from?

MR. CAJAMARCA: *De Facatativá. Fui concejal elegido popularmente y fui sacado de Colombia por su gobierno y perseguido por paramilitares que apoyaban a usted en la vereda la tribuna en Facatativá, Cundinamarca y que ellos trabajaban con el batallón escuela de comunicaciones de Facatativá.*

*Más de treinta dirigentes políticos detenidos, entre ellos nueve congresistas, nueve gobernadores - perdon, dos gobernadores, cinco alcaldes, el ex director de Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad, su amigo personal, Jorge Noguera, así como su jefe de informática Rafael Garcia y una lista interminable de funcionarios de su gobierno vinculados al paramilitarismo nunca han sido señalados por usted como terroristas. Mucho menos, y es lo que más asombra al mundo, Salvatore Mancuso ha sido llamado por usted terrorista.*

*Cómo explica usted a la comunidad internacional que usted si señale Gustavo Petro, senador de la República que ha condenado atrocidades de las FARC y ha sido claro en esto – cómo usted explica a la comunidad internacional que usted llame a este hombre terrorista? Cómo explica usted a la comunidad internacional que usted diga esta mañana al President Bush que se respetan los derechos humanos en Colombia cuando hay una crisis humanitaria evidente, la segunda después de países del Africa? Esa es la pregunta concreta. Gracias.*

Q: (Translated.) From Facatativa. I was popularly elected councillor and I was exiled from Colombia, by your government and persecuted by paramilitaries who supported you in acceding to the grand stand of Facatativa and worked with the battalion of the communications school in Facatativa.

More than 30 detained politicians, among them nine congressmen, nine governors – excuse me – two governors, five executives, the manager of the security administrative department, DAS, his friend, Jorge Noguera, as well as his information chief, Rafael Garcia, and an interminable list of officials of your government, that were associated with the paramilitarism, have never been mentioned by you as terrorists. Much less, and what most surprises is the fact that you don't consider Salvatore Mancuso a terrorist.

How do you explain to the international community that you point out Gustavo Petro, senator of the republic who has condemned atrocities, and has been clear on this? How do you explain to the international community that you consider this man a

terrorist? How do you explain to the international community what you have said this morning to President Bush that human rights are respected in Colombia, when there is an obvious humanitarian crisis, the second after the countries in Africa? This is the concrete question. Thank you.

PRES URIBE: *Primero, yo siempre he*

PRES. URIBE: (Translated.) First of all –

MR. CAJAMARCA: *Escúcheme. Si pudieran traducir porque aquí hay personas que hablan inglés.*

MR. CAJAMARCA: (Translated.) Excuse me. If you could translate, because there are people here who speak English.

MR. RESTREPO: *Lo vamos a traducir más tarde.*

MR.RESTREPO: (Translated.) We'll translate it later.

MR. CAJAMARCA: *Muy gentil. Gracias.*

MR. CAJAMARCA: (Translated.) Thank you very much.

PRES URIBE: *Primero le quiero decir esto. Necesitamos una Colombia sin terroristas paramilitares. Eso es lo primero que le rectifica su afirmación, una Colombia sin terroristas guerrilleros, una Colombia sin narcotráfico que los patrocinen. Eso lo he repetido una y otra vez en todas partes. Lo más importante no es el discurso sino los hechos. Dígame un gobierno que pueda decir que los tiene en la cárcel. Es que yo acaso los crié, yo los encontré. Compruebe me lo contrario. Que tristeza tener que aceptar estos vejámenes a alguien que lleva tanto tiempo fuera de Colombia. (Inaudible) al respecto a la democracia, no se vaya hacer decir usted terrorista sin camuflado. Que los hombres también tenemos dignidad.*

*Ahí van viendo ustedes el nivel del debate político con algunos de mis compatriotas. Nunca se quejaron del paramilitarismo mientras existió. Se quejan ahora en el gobierno que lo ha desmontado. (Aplausos.) Le tenían miedo al paramilitarismo cuando el paramilitarismo estaba en su alta, en su furor. Al único que le decían paramilitar en Colombia hace cinco años era a mí. Pero no le decían a los paramilitares. Ahora gracias a un gobierno que se los ha desmontado, ya les perdieron el miedo. Y nunca los vi rechazar la guerrilla. Creían que la FARC estaba triunfante, que ya iba a ganar. Si al mundo le digo, de pronto mi contribución en Colombia es haber evitado que las FARC siguiera descomponiendo al país. Y eso le ha dolido a mucha gente. Y eso lo vamos a hacer hasta el último día de mi vida. Y que no quepa duda sobre eso. Ahora eso que usted señala fue lo que encontramos de guerrilla y paramilitares, y es lo que estamos resolviéndole al país.*

*Miembros de mi gobierno, Jorge Noguera, sí, yo lo nombre director del DAS, no por amistad personal. Lo conocí en la campaña del 2002. Lo nombre como nombre a muchos jóvenes que conocí en esa campaña. Estaba comprometido en la lucha contra el*



*terrorismo. Nunca me hablaron mal de él. Ni los organismos internacionales, ni la justicia, ni las embajadas mientras fue director del DAS. Mientras fue director de DAS tenía toda la confianza de la embajada de los Estados Unidos. Aparecieron cargos contra el seis meses después de haber dejado la dirección del DAS.*

*¿Qué estamos haciendo nosotros? Yo apoya la justicia. Yo confiaría que Jorge Noguera fuera capaz de demostrar su inocencia. Si lo condenan de dicho al país, infortunadamente yo lo nombre. Lo nombre con total buena fe. La mayoría de los hechos que están investigando los congresistas fueron anteriores de mi gobierno. Eso es bien importante. Por qué no miran a las elecciones del 2006 cuando ya mi gobierno llevaba cuatro años. Eso es bien importante que el mundo lo considere.*

*Yo fui elegido en el 2002 prácticamente sin apoyo parlamentario. Cré una coalición en el parlamento para que aprobaran las leyes que necesitaba el país. Decían, <<Uribe no va a tener gobernabilidad porque no tiene apoyo parlamentario.>> Lo conseguí después de elecciones. Y para apoyar la justicia no me he detenido a decir, julano de tal me apoyaba en el congreso o no me apoyaba. Y está bien. Esto no se hubiera hecho sin esta política. Contrariamente a lo que escriben aquí algunos, las pruebas para los (unintelligible) que hay en Colombia las recogieron el ejército y la policía.*

*Cuando un paramilitar se fugo de la zona de ubicación de Ralito, la orden de mi gobierno era capturarlo y le decomisaron un computador donde empezaron a aparecer esas pruebas. En el ambiente colombiano anterior a mi elección a la gente le daba miedo dar testimonio. Hoy gracias a que se sienten seguros le perdieron el temor a testificar. Lo que puedes tener tu en seguridad es esto, si regresas a Colombia se te da toda la protección. Para mi es una cuestión de honor.*

*Hay que ver los críticos míos antes vivían en el extranjero. A uno lo conocí por allá en las embajadas en Europa, criticando lo que yo hacía en la gobernación de Antioquia. Otra me criticaba desde Canadá, ahora viven tranquilos en Colombia. Con cualquier clase de críticas contra el presidente, acusaciones, y tranquilos. Yo me he preocupado mas por proteger a la oposición que a mi mismo. Dígame usted, un solo caso parecido a mi gobierno a lo que pasó con la Unión Patriótica, y no se olvide el otro cuento. Todo los dirigentes políticos amigos de esta causa, asesinados en tantas regiones colombianas.*

PRES. URIBE: (Translated.) First of all, I want to say this: every time I refer to terrorists, I have stated we need a Colombia without paramilitary terrorists. This is the first aspect that rectifies your statement: a Colombia without guerrilla terrorists, without narco-trafficking that funds them. I have repeated this over and over in all places. But the discourse is not the most important, but the facts. Show me a government that can say that it's imprisoned them. Did I create them? I found them. Prove me the contrary. How sad it would be to accept these repressions to someone who is obliged to live for such a long time outside Colombia. With regard to democracy, I will not name you a terrorist without camouflage, because men have their dignity.

You must notice the level of the political debate of some of my compatriots. They have never complained about the paramilitarism while it existed. They complain now when the government has destroyed it. (Applause.) They were afraid of the paramilitarism when the paramilitarism ruling.

The only person who was named a paramilitary five years ago in Colombia was me, but the paramilitaries themselves were not. Now, thanks to a government that dismantled them, they're not feared anymore. And I never saw them reject the guerrillas. They thought that the FARC was triumphant, that it was going to win. I tell the world that perhaps my contribution to Colombia was to prevent the FARC from continuing to fracture the country, and this has hurt a lot of people. And this is what I am going to do all my life. And there must be no doubt about it. What you point out is what we found of guerrillas and paramilitaries, and it's what we're doing to resolve this in the country.

Members of my government, Jorge Noguera whom I have appointed as head of DAS, not because he was my friend – I met him during the campaign in 2002 – I appointed him as I appointed many other young men who I met during that campaign. He was dedicated to the fight against terrorism. No one ever spoke poorly of him to me. Not international organizations, nor justice, nor the embassies while he was head of the DAS. During this period he benefited of the full confidence of the United States embassy. Charges appeared against him six months after he left the head of the DAS.

What are we doing? I support justice. I believe that Jorge Noguera is capable of proving his innocence. If the country convicts him, I have, unfortunately, appointed him trusting him. The majority of the facts that the congressmen are now investigating happened before my administration. This is very important. Why don't they take into account the elections of 2006 when my government had four years already? This is important for the people to know.

I was elected in 2002 practically without parliamentary support. I formed a coalition in the parliament in order to approve the laws that were necessary for the country. They were saying, Uribe will not be able to govern because he doesn't have parliamentary support, but I obtained that after the elections. And for supporting justice, I have not refrained from saying that so and so from congress supported me or didn't support me. And it's fine. This would not have been done without these politics. Contrary to what some people have written here, the evidence for the (unintelligible) in Colombia were collected by the army and the police.

When a paramilitary tried to escape the designated zone in Ralito, the order of my government was to seize him and we seized a computer where we began to find evidence. In the Colombian environment, previous to my election, the people feared giving testimony. Nowadays, thanks to the fact that they feel secure, they don't fear testifying anymore. You can be sure that if you return to Colombia, you will be granted all the protection you need. To me, it's question of honor.

You must see the critics who criticized me and lived abroad. I have met one of them in an embassy in Europe criticizing how I was governing Antioquia. Others were criticizing me from Canada and now they're safe in Colombia. With any type of criticism against the president, accusations against the president, I was more preoccupied protecting the opposition than myself. Give me one example that took place during my government with regard to what happened to the Patriotic Union – and do not forget the other story – all the politicians, friends of the cause arrested and killed in so many Colombian regions.

MR. RESTREPO: There are so many questions and so little time and so many topics. I'm actually going to take the prerogative to ask you what I believe will be our final question. And I've been struck that no one's asked this question, and it goes to the trade agreement. And trade agreements with the Americas for the United States have had unintended consequences. There have been good things and there have been bad things. One of the unintended consequences, for example, of NAFTA is the effect that it has had on the rural farming economy of Mexico.

What if anything is your government prepared to do to protect those who are either missed by or victimized by the opening up of trade with the United States if you actually are successful in getting the agreement approved by the United States Congress?

PRES. URIBE: Okay. It is very important to look at the trade numbers and to look and to assess the political reasons. Trade numbers – when you subtract oil in our bilateral balance between Colombia and the United States, there is a (unintelligible) in favor of the United States. From the pure economic point of view, the Free Trade Agreement is an opportunity for Colombia to have better possibilities to balance this bilateral equation.

From the point of view of political reasons, it is very important to say in Latin America this: our government does not dismantle government as many countries in Latin America did in the '90s. Remember, after the Washington consensus, many countries in Latin America began to dismantle government. We have restructured 340 state agencies, and we will continue with this restructure. And there is a new trend in South America – statism. Our government is not in this trend. We promote free, private initiative with social responsibility. It is a very important equilibrium. Our state is made up of independent institutions: the justice is independent, Congress is independent, the most dependent is the executive branch, and is the one that has to assume political accountability permanently.

One country, ally of the United States committed to freedoms, committed to social justice, committed to free, private initiative with social responsibility should not be excluded from this agreement.

Rural areas: we have short-term crops and long-term crops. The rate of productivity Colombia has in some short-term crops is not as high as it is in Argentina or here in the States because our country is a tropical one. But in long-term crops,

Colombia has many possibilities; for instance, in palm oil, in forestry, in rubber, in others. We are certain that we can support these long-term crops and give Colombians greater possibilities in the countryside.

Of course, the Free Trade Agreement is very important for this subject. One possibility we have is to export to the United States and to Europe and to other countries biofuels. My government has begun in Colombia the era, the time of biofuels production. It is very important for the people living in the countryside.

Recently, our Congress approved a new law. I have already enacted it. Its name is *Agro Ingreso Seguro*, "Agribusiness, Sure Income." The vast majority of resources are oriented to support middle and small entrepreneurs, and we are certain that we can give them opportunities. Of course, there are concerns because of corn, because of other cereals, short-term crops, because of rice, but we need to look over economy as a whole.

I have said the free trade agreement is very important, but it's not all what we need. Remember, in the last year my government has promoted the agreement between the Andean community and Mercosur. It has been already approved. My government made all the efforts and we got the acceptance of Colombia within the Plan Panama Puebla (ph). We hope that in the next weeks we can sign the agreement with three Central American countries. We are beginning negotiations with Canada. We signed an agreement with Chile. We are going to remove with Peru the barriers between the Andean Community opposed to investment in both countries. We are beginning negotiations with Europe and we are on the way to sign to negotiate agreements of a reciprocal investment protection with Asian countries.

Colombia – in many discussions in South America I have said, you have natural gas, you don't need trade agreements. You have oil; you don't need trade agreements. Colombia has products in need of trade agreements to put this product into the international markets. And let me finish with this: the best jobs we can create are in the exporting sector. High quality jobs with affiliation to the social security system. Please consider this. Give me a fair balance. I have never read in my critics the improvement we have made in affiliation to the social security system, and it is very easy to check in Colombia, to rectify or to ratify what I say here, to formalize the labor economy, to affiliate workers to the social security system, to guarantee them high quality jobs. The Free Trade Agreement is a very good step.

Thank you, distinguished friends.

(Applause.)

(END)