

ADDRESS AT THE NORWEGIAN NOBEL INSTITUTE.Oslo,
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A few years ago Jostein Gaarder gave life to a small and inquisitive child called Sophie Amundsen and to an extravagant professor of philosophy named Albert Knox. Together they relive, with imagination and fantasy, the world's interest, particularly the interest of the young, in the evolution of philosophical thinking. His magic lies in talking about complex issues in simple words and lasting images.

Today I wish I had Gaarder's fabulist talent to tell his countrymen, and Sophie's countrymen, with his clarity and precision, what is happening, what is being lived, and what is being dreamed in my country: a nation that loves life and happiness, a country that is presently living the most crucial moment in its recent history.

I will try to do so. I feel particularly honored to be here today at the Nobel Institute, the entity that, by Alfred Nobel's will, has the overwhelming responsibility of appointing each year the winner of the Nobel Peace Prize. I can think of no better

forum than this to talk about my country and its dearest wish: peace!

Colombia, like other countries of this contemporary world, has a long and complex history, replenished with both successes and failures; with many things yet to be done, with its own values, its own political culture, and its own institutions, built amidst many difficulties and obstacles, more so than any other country in Latin America.

We have lived extended periods of peace during which we have laid the foundations for our development, but those years have been replaced by an era of violent confrontation that has threatened to destroy them. Nonetheless, and in spite of such difficult confrontations, we Colombians continue working for a better future, with the confidence provided to us by our institutions and the knowledge of a past that has witnessed more than once the grandeur of our people.

In my country, fortunately, the exercise of democracy, free elections, respect for basic liberties, the promotion of human rights, social and economic rights included, as well as the so

called third generation rights, continue being some of the fundamental characteristics of our political system.

In October of last year, that is six months ago, millions of Colombians freely elected their regional leaders through massive voting: governors, mayors, district deputies, council members, and town councilors, thus evidencing once more that Colombia, in spite of its public order difficulties, believes above all in the power of the vote and the exercise of democracy.

I am telling you this because sometimes we forget that Colombia has patiently built a respectable institutional framework, that has for many decades withstood the ferocious attack of the world's most dangerous criminal organizations, that it has not parted from democracy, that the legitimacy of its government is indisputable, and its leaders have deployed great efforts to open the political scheme to all sectors of society in a multi-party system that increasingly includes more independent and novel options.

Colombia has been, and continues being, a bulwark of democracy, and of both political and economic stability in Latin America.

Like any democracy, it has had and still has its flaws. But we have always worked with the will to overcome them, without taking the road of authoritarianism. The government I have the honor of presiding was elected in an electoral process whose transparency has not been put in doubt by anyone, registering the highest vote in our history. My predecessor, a member of the opposite party, handed power over to us with no traumatismos or setbacks. The different branches of our public powers operate independently and autonomously, and control agencies discharge their obligations in complete independence.

Ladies and Gentlemen: If democracy were weak in Colombia, it would have already disappeared! Our force lies precisely in our faith in its values.

Colombia is surely living today circumstances that are testing us as a nation, but we are confident that we will come out of this with renewed energy, as we have done in the past.

The historic legacy of past generations, which constitutes our most precious asset, has been threatened by the emergence of the narco-trafficking phenomenon in our national life in the course of the last twenty years.

Narcotics trafficking, and the immense economic resources it produces, has been the main catalyst of violence in my country; it has distributed large sums of money among different social sectors, nurturing intense cycles of corruption; it has displaced the traditional agricultural geography of our country with illegal crops, and its expansion has fostered the colonization of new territories. Given its illegal nature, narco-trafficking takes place amidst dramatic violence, at a very high social cost, and has become the main source of conflict and poverty.

Colombia, in spite of lacking the resources required to confront this threat, has never given in to it. On the contrary,

we have sacrificed an important number of our best men and women and diverted important sums of money that should have been invested in social development. The country has assumed with great dignity and courage its share of a crime that is clearly international in nature.

I am not exaggerating when I say that for every line of cocaine snorted in Europe, the United States or elsewhere in the world, there is one death in Colombia!

However, as we manage to balance the burden of confronting this crime equitably, Colombia must continue its historic trend of consolidating and strengthening the social rule of law that will allow it to connect to the globalized world of the twenty first century.

My government has worked relentlessly to this end, assuming with courage each and every challenge imposed on it at this juncture. We are tackling every aspect of this problem with decision and, above all, with a long-term view, building our future amidst much incomprehension and sacrifice.

On my first day in office I announced that we would radically change the country's direction and that we would do so respecting our democratic and constitutional institutions at all times. Our decision was based on the fact that Colombia has been accruing a series of problems whose resolution can no longer be postponed with simplistic formulas, so we started to confront them knowing beforehand the political cost of the unpopularity implied in our decision.

Given that we are dealing with problems fueled by a complex set of historic processes, we did not promise miracles, we promised serious and responsible work, audacity to find creative alternatives, tenacity to confront adversity, and courage to apply corrective measures, regardless of how painful these may be.

We have identified violence, corruption, and poverty resulting from unemployment, unbalanced public expending, and weakening of the State as our most pressing problems. We have acted on each of these fronts without hesitation and today we are starting to see positive results.

Colombia has withstood for four decades the social cost of an armed conflict that is bleeding our country to death and which is financed mainly by narcomonies. My government, in furtherance of the mandate entrusted to it by millions of Colombians, assumed the challenge of resolving this conflict through dialogue and negotiation.

Yet I must be clear, because I frequently see much confusion in the international community as to the true dimension of this conflict. There is no civil war in Colombia: what we have is a war against civil society.

A civil war occurs when the sons of a single nation confront each other in factions that group large numbers of its inhabitants. But such is not the case in Colombia. We are a country of 40 million people, where illegal armed players, both guerrilla as well as self-defense groups, do not even add up to 40,000 members, that is, less than a thousandth part of the population, and their popular support barely represents 3% of our people.

In Colombia, the overwhelming majority of us want peace and not confrontation, and I am committed to that goal, and I hope to achieve peace through a policy that isn't just a government policy, rather it is a true State policy that brings together the different political and social forces of my country.

Today I can say, in spite of the recent hurdles in the process, that we have accomplished in two years what was unthinkable for decades. With the FARC, the largest and oldest rebel group in the country, we initiated a negotiation process, with a well-defined agenda and procedures, with the participation of all social sectors of Colombia. The living forces of Colombia, through a process of public hearings, presented to a Thematic Committee made up by representatives of both Colombian institutions and the guerrilla, their formulas for progress in the fields of employment and economic reactivation, with the purpose of discussing them at the Negotiation Table. Over eleven hundred (1,100) Colombians of all sectors and regions submitted their proposals and over twenty four thousand (24,000) people came to the public hearings, which were also aired on television.

A year ago government and FARC negotiators visited several European countries, Norway included, with the purpose of taking a look at other economic models and discussing certain issues of the world of the new millennium. They specifically discussed the moral imperative of humanizing the conflict by having the guerrilla respect International Humanitarian Law.

More recently, during the period when the FARC froze the negotiation process, I personally met with the leader of this guerrilla group and we agreed to continue the process, to provide such process with greater guarantees and greater international accompaniment. Part of this accompaniment is reflected in the establishment of a Commission of Facilitating Countries, where we are fortunate enough to include Norway.

Against our will, we have found ourselves forced to continue talks amidst confrontation, but we expect clear acts of peace from those in arms.

In the meantime, we will continue fulfilling our constitutional duty of safeguarding public order and our citizens' tranquility. To this end we are strengthening the efficiency of the Armed Forces within the framework of respect for human rights.

We have also made progress with the ELN, the second largest rebel group of Colombia, and with whom we are about to initiate peace talks, that could be held at the Meeting Place, with international oversight, and a fixed term. At this stage of the process we are also fortunate to have Norway forming part of the Commission of Friendly Nations.

As for the so called self-defense groups, established illegally and as a response to the violence and as vengeance against the insurgents' absurd attacks, let me clarify that the government of Colombia and its Armed Forces are persecuting them with the full force of the law, like we persecute any criminal who breeds death and pain throughout the country.

The few military men who have gone astray and lost their good judgment and given illegal self-defense groups their

individual support or have been negligent in their persecution, have been detected, punished, and discharged from service. Yet I must emphasize that the Armed Forces of Colombia are neither the allies nor accomplices of these criminal groups, to whom we have not recognized and will never recognize political status.

The international community must know that we have devised a Plan of Actions against these criminal groups that will be enforced with decision and conviction.

In the first place, we have created a “National Coordination Center for the Fight against Illegal Self-defense Groups”, where the national government and Security Forces share a seat with the Procurator General’s Office, the Attorney General’s Office and the Ombudsman’s Office.

In the second place, we set up a Financial Brigade, with the participation of the Attorney General’s Office, the Banking Superintendence, the Tax Authority, and the State’s Intelligence Agencies, with the purpose of detecting and

combating the funds derived from the self-defense groups' criminal activities, and anyone financing these illegal groups.

In the third place, we are waging a pitched battle and staging multiple military operations against these groups, which have increased by 123% in the last 12 months. It is nevertheless important to clarify that even though the figures of arrested people are lower than the guerrilla figures, this is due to the fact that these groups are three times smaller than the latter. But let us look at the figures: During my government we have made 719 arrests and there have been 134 casualties among their members. Last year alone 419 members of illegal self-defense groups were killed in combat or captured, increasing by 14% the number of arrests and increasing by 163% the number of those fallen in combat during 1999. Furthermore, in the first quarter of this year we killed in combat or captured 128 self-defense group members. Likewise, we gunned down one of these irregular forces' armed helicopter.

Another important piece of information is the number of self-defense group members that are presently in prison. About 800, which is over 10% of its members, are now behind bars

in Colombian prisons. Such percentage is much higher than the number of detained rebels.

In the fourth place, and moving on to judicial aspects, we find equally revealing figures: The number of criminal cases filed by the Attorney General's Office against self-defense groups is 3 times greater than those filed against rebels.

Investigations are not just criminal investigations. We also have administrative investigations, which have yielded important results. We do not promote impunity in Colombia! Denouncement of acts of cooperation or omission by members of Security Forces in favor of these illegal forces cannot remain in impunity. Besides internal disciplinary measures, independent control and supervisory bodies investigate these cases and adopt decisions with full autonomy from government, and the government respects and enforces their decisions. As indisputable proof of what I have said are the destitution rulings and punishments imposed on high-ranking officers of the Armed Forces for the actions or omissions that were denounced.

In the fifth place, we have assigned to the Commander General of the military forces, within the framework of a far reaching legal reform aimed at modernizing and professionalizing military forces, the discretionary power to immediately discharge from its ranks, with no prior trial, uniformed men, regardless of their rank, and against whom there exist well founded suspicions that they violated human rights or cooperated with illegal groups. In its short life, this power has already been exercised, and 458 members have been discharged from the military forces, 89 of which are officers.

We have also reformed the Military Criminal Justice System and Colombian Criminal Legislation, by limiting military jurisdiction and by typifying forced disappearance and torture as crimes in our legislation.

In the sixth place, I must underline that most of the aerial spraying of large illegal crops has been undertaken in areas where there is much self-defense group presence, and where we have destroyed dozens of illegal drug processing laboratories.

As can be seen, the State of Colombia has not remained, nor will it remain, idle in this pitched battle against these criminal groups. We are operating within the framework of a serious and coherent plan that is starting to bear fruit.

My government is fully committed to enforcing minimum humanitarian laws to relieve, even partially, the suffering caused by the internal conflict on its victims and on civil society.

In this regard, we have incorporated into our internal legislation the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition and Destruction of Land Mines. Likewise, we have also freed every man under the age of 18 from mandatory military services, thus going beyond the Convention on the Rights of Children.

Dear friends of Norway:

As you well know, I just attended the III Summit of the Americas in Quebec, where I met with the Heads of State and

Government of 34 countries of the Americas. You cannot imagine how pleased I was to receive the decided support of the entire American continent in favor of our efforts to achieve peace, reconciliation and the enhancement of our democratic values!

Clearly, all the representatives of American States requested a firm commitment to a cease-fire and the end of hostilities, and requested rebel groups to act in a manner proportional to the efforts deployed by the Government of Colombia to achieve this goal.

I know that in Norway, and all of Europe, we find a similar cry, so violent groups in Colombia soon stop using the reason of force and start believing in the force of reason.

I can tell you here and now, from the bottom of my heart, that I do not know whether I will be able to consolidate peace during the year and 3 months I have left as President of Colombia, but all I know is that I will never stop fighting for peace.

You can rest assured that we will lay the foundations for the talks and for peaceful coexistence, so future generations may enjoy the privilege we have regretfully not had: the privilege of living in peace.

Dear friends:

All actions taken in our quest for peace, for combating corruption, for cleaning up public finances, and for recovering the economy, are in the end aimed at strengthening the State's institutional presence as a fundamental and undeferable prerequisite for the country to insert itself positively in this world of globalization.

It is in this perspective that we find the Strategy for Institutional Strengthening and Social Development presently underway in Colombia, which has already been introduced to the international community. As a country, and with the consensus of all forces, we are standing up to the challenge of recovering the State's core responsibilities: the exercise of democracy, generating conditions favoring employment,

respect for human rights, the quest for peace, and the fight against narco trafficking.

With this strategy we are laying the foundations for lasting peace and development with social justice, and we are confident that we will receive the support of friendly nations interested in doing justice to the courage and sacrifice made by our nation during the last few decades.

I am convinced the Kingdom of Norway, as an active participant in the Support Group of the Peace Process in Colombia, will continue supporting this mechanism of support for the most vulnerable sectors of our country, as was the case during the meeting held in Bogota last October. Our next meeting in Brussels will be an ideal opportunity for Europe to continue evidencing with facts that the principle of shared responsibility is far more than mere rhetoric; it is a tangible reality that exalts the people of Norway and its European colleagues for their commitment to the future of mankind.

Among the programs for which we have requested the international community's cooperation, in an act of responsibility more than mere solidarity, we find programs for servicing the populations displaced by the armed conflict; for supporting environmental community programs or community programs for building works of infrastructure or productive type programs; for protecting human rights advocates, and for implementing the integral alternative development programs that make room for substituting illegal crops by legal crops, having the lowest environmental and social cost.

I know that Norway is proud to fly the flag of the environmental fight in Europe and worldwide, and that is why I invite you to cooperate with enthusiasm in the conservation of the Colombian ecosystem which holds 10% of the globe's biodiversity and which is seriously affected by the deforestation caused by coca leaf and poppy seed cultivation.

It is estimated that during the course of the last ten years narcotrafficking has destroyed about 1 million hectares of natural forests. This horrifying figure moves us all to action.

Today I want to talk about the status of ongoing voluntary and manual illegal crop substitution programs having good possibilities in areas as complex as the Putumayo, region where peasants and natives are starting to enroll in the programs and alternatives provided by the Government.

Naturally, these programs -of paramount importance for small farmers- do not suffice to counter industrial scale illegal crops. Fumigation continues being necessary in these cases, but the international community can rest assured that we will do whatever it takes to not compromise the environment. For example, we have refused to use exogenous elements such as the fusarium oxisporum fungi to avoid the risk of environmental degradation and deterioration of human health.

And it is important to make an additional clarification: the environmental damage caused by narcotraffickers when they plant and produce drugs is much greater than the environmental damage produced by the Government's aerial spraying of large illegal crops, using strict technical parameters to minimize the harmful effects on the population and the environment. In effect, while in 1998 we used

150,000 liters of glyphosate herbicides for fumigation, narco-trafficking used 163,000 tons of precursor chemicals for planting and processing narcotics.

It is estimated that over 900,000 tons of precursor chemicals have been used in narcotics production during the last 15 years, and the effects thereof generally end up in the thousands of small waterways that abound in my country. Therefore, as you can see, in this case we cannot say that the cure is worse than the disease. To allow the drug business to flourish, alleging ecological reasons, would be the most harmful and mistaken alternative, not just for the Colombian environment but also for the whole world.

My dear friends:

We Colombians are building, with the support of the international community, the Colombia of the XXI Century: a Colombia in peace, with employment opportunities for its people, with strong institutions, and a sound economy. We are traveling the road to progress and social justice with the

active participation of other countries in the fight against the world drug problem.

That is the Colombia we are building, with the willingness and courage of all Colombians, with my government's indeclinable decision, and with the solidary support of many friendly nations such as the Kingdom of Norway!

The history of nations may be seen as a succession of ups and downs, of falls and rebirths. But it has always been man's free will that has allowed us to overcome the falls and build prosperity, as has been taught to us throughout the centuries by the Norwegian people, who are today a clear example of coexistence and social and economic achievements for the whole world.

Colombians have lived the winter of their misfortunes and there is no doubt in my mind that we are starting to live the spring of our hopes. We have the ability to do so. We are not a mass of violent, mediocre or corrupt people, as many have wanted to label us with excessive simplicity. On the contrary, we are a people fighting against multiple adversities; we are a

people that is starting to recover its confidence in its best values and ability to carry on.

Henrik Ibsen said *“people with life, no matter how ravaged their life may be, find courage and strength in adversity”*. This description fits Colombia perfectly and summarizes the reason why I am here talking about my country, its problems, and its overwhelming capacity to overcome them: Because Colombia is “a people with life”

Like our Nobel Prize, Gabriel García Márquez once said, we deserve and we are getting *“a second chance on earth”*.

I invite you, my dear friends, to accompany Colombia in its commitment with hope and the future.

Thank you very much.