

**ADDRESS, BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN
AFFAIRS OF THE NORWEGIAN PARLIAMENT. Oslo, April 25th,
2001**

Dear friends:

I am truly honored to address the distinguished members of the Norwegian Parliament, an institution of great tradition and importance in this country's political system, which is an example of democracy and social justice.

Before engaging in a more informal dialogue with you, allow me to very quickly share with you some of the things that we are doing in Colombia to achieve peace and guarantee a fair and safe future for our people.

My government is working for peace, but not behind the back of civil society. On the contrary, we are working with civil society, who is represented in the National Peace Council, the entity that supports and defines the guidelines of the policy governing ongoing talks. Civil Society is also represented in the Common Front for Peace and against Violence, which brings together the country's main political

parties and independent movements, and where we consult the main decisions regarding the way in which we are managing this very important issue.

Norway's support to the peace process is, therefore, more than just supporting a single government: it supports the common effort of all Colombians.

Today I can say that, in spite of the recent obstacles encountered in the peace process, we have achieved in two years the unthinkable for decades. We initiated a negotiation process with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia - FARC, the largest and oldest guerrilla group of Colombia. We already have in place a well-defined agenda and procedures, defined with the participation of all sectors of society. The living forces of Colombia, through a process of public hearings, presented to the Thematical Committee, comprised of representatives from Colombian institutions and insurgency, their formulas for progressing 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 attended the public hearings, that, were also aired on television.

A year ago FARC and government negotiators visited several European countries, Norway included, with the purpose of seeing firsthand different 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 in which FARC froze the process, I personally met with the leader of this rebel group and we agreed to continue the process, to provide it with greater guarantees and greater international accompaniment.

We have found ourselves forced, against our will, to continue the dialogues amidst confrontation, but we hope for acts of peace from those in arms. In the meantime, we will continue fulfilling our constitutional duty of safeguarding our order and our people's tranquility. To that end we are strengthening the

efficiency of Armed Forces within the framework of 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. We feel very fortunate to have Norway forming part of the Commission of Friendly Nations at this stage of the process.

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 anywhere in the country.

We must start by accepting and understanding my country's difficult reality: In a situation as complex as the Colombian situation, where besides structural exclusion problems we must add the corrupting power of narco-trafficking, the

degradation of the environment, and the indiscriminate violence of guerrilla and self-defense groups, who cause so much pain to the civil population, it is feasible that we still find some violations of human rights by individual State agents, behaviors that we are also persecuting and punishing as these are denounced.

But we cannot disregard that 98% of the violations of basic rights in Colombia are caused by the guerrilla's and self-defense groups' violent actions, who insist on assassinating, kidnapping, recruiting minors, and attacking the country's electricity and social infrastructures. I must say that sometimes we Colombians feel so alone, when we do not hear the protest and denouncements of the international community or NGOs regarding these acts of cruelty and inhumanity that afflict our civil population.

My Government devised, since its first day in office, a policy for protecting human rights and complying with International Humanitarian Law, which we are enforcing with great decision and we do so out of deep ethical conviction and not imposition.

This policy involves fighting self-defense and private justice groups; protecting the advocates of human rights, labor unionists and their venues; preventing displacement and providing assistance to the displaced populations. We have also made fundamental progress in the legislative arena with the New Military Criminal Code, which limits the so called military jurisdiction; we have typified forced disappearance and torture as crimes in our legislation; we have excluded minors from joining the Armed Forces, and we have ratified the Ottawa Convention on the Elimination of Land Mines.

However, it must be clear that while the intolerants continue insisting on their violent methods, the State's legitimate Forces will continue fulfilling their unwaivable obligation of combating those who harm the civil population, be they leftists or rightists, guerrilla or counter guerrilla. And let there be no doubt here: we are intent on combating criminal and self-defense groups alike.

Every day we see better operational results in the fight against these criminal groups, thanks to which over 10% of their members are behind bars in Colombian prisons today.

Our goal is to put an end to so much violence, wherever it comes from, and at the same time provide feasible subsistence opportunities to our peasants.

There are many areas in which we can and want to have the friendly presence of Norway, a country with whom we share a seat as non-permanent members of the United Nations Security Council.

We want to work together to achieve peace in Colombia and the world; we want to work in favor of the protection of the environment, of the empire of human rights, and the strict compliance of International Humanitarian Law.

We are very grateful for the pivotal role played by Norway during the meetings of the Support Group of the Peace Process, -the next of which will take place next week in Brussels-, and for offering a concrete contribution to support

programs in the fields of the human rights, the environment, and servicing the people displaced by violence.

We are very grateful for Norway's active participation as facilitating country in the ongoing peace process with the FARC and the ELN.

We are very pleased to have a Norwegian, Mr. Jan Egeland, acting as Special Advisor to the United Nations Secretary General for International Assistance to Colombia.

We have come here today to openly discuss the issues of greatest interest to you. Therefore, upon concluding this brief introduction, I would be more than happy to entertain your questions or comments, because I am convinced that Norway and its Parliament will always be the close friends of Colombia, its peace, and its social development.

Thank you very much.