

**ADDRESS DURING THE LUNCH OFFERED BY THE
PRIME MINISTER OF THE KINGDOM OF NORWAY, JENS
STOLTENBERG.**Oslo, April 25th, 2001

“I gamble my life, I barter my life.

In any event,

lost is my life...”

This disenchanting verse, taken from the “The Sergio Stepansky Story”, is part of the collective memory of all Colombians. I am quoting him here today because these are the words of one of our greatest poets, a descendant of a saga of Vikings, our unforgettable Leon De Greiff, whose talent serves me to pay a deep felt tribute to the presence of Scandinavian people in my country.

Leon De Greiff, who defined himself as *“the ex-Viking, ex-Cuirassier, ex-Captain dream of Vandal paladins, Goths and Swedes”*, is merely the tip of the iceberg of all the Nordic men and women who helped build our history.

Ever since legendary times, when Bjarni Herjolfsson discovered Vineland in the X century, which was nothing

more than the Northern tip of the Americas, to present times, when our people fight together for the defense of universal values, like human rights and the protection of the environment, we can draw a constant and ascending line: the line of understanding and cooperation.

But it is not necessary to go back in history because present times provide us with the best examples. Norway, through Mr. Jan Egeland, Special Advisor to the United Nations Secretary General for International Assistance to Colombia, is playing a pivotal role in the creation of opportunities for Colombians. Furthermore, through your Government and several Non Governmental Organizations you are giving your decided support to the social development of our country, a prerequisite for achieving a true and lasting peace.

Mr. Prime Minister Stoltenberg:

Your country honors us today with its hospitality and we, who have come from the beautiful and distant Colombia, with the warmth of the tropics in our blood, wish to tell you, on behalf of the 40 million people living in our vast territory in modern

cities, mountains, valleys, jungles and beaches value, appreciate and consider the friendship of the Norwegian people a precious treasure.

We admire Norway's historic legacy, its constant willingness to assist international cooperation, the literary immensity of Ibsen and Hamsun, the simple and wonderful music of Grieg, the Antarctic tales of explorer Roald Amundsen, the human expression in Munch's paintings, and Gaarder's novel pedagogy.

It is wonderful to add to this admiration our gratitude for the interest and willingness of the Norwegian Kingdom to help consolidate a climate of peace and social progress in my country, whose fate is determining in Latin America!

In Colombia, a democratic and civilist country like few others, we are fighting courageously to consolidate an internal peace that has avoided us for 40 years; to improve our people's social conditions; to protect the good health of our natural resources; and to become a positive factor in the international arena, more so today, when we act as non permanent

members of the United Nations Security Council, where we share this responsibility and willingness with the Norwegian people.

The achievement of peace in Colombia is not just a government concern. It is a true State policy that brings together the different political and social forces of our country. Norway's support to the peace process is, therefore, more than just supporting my government: you support the common effort of all Colombians.

A year ago a group of Government and FARC negotiators visited Norway among other European nations, on a fact-finding mission. Norway acted as facilitator during the International Hearing on the Environment and Illegal Crops held last June in San Vicente del Caguan. Norway sits on the Commission of Friendly Nations for the creation of a Meeting Place for the talks with the ELN. Norway also has a seat in the Commission of Facilitating Countries in the peace process with FARC.

Furthermore, Norway played a very active role in the first meeting of the Support Group of the Peace Process of Colombia held last July in Madrid, as well as in the second meeting held last October in Bogota. That is why I am convinced that Norway will once again play a determining role during the third meeting to be held next week in Brussels.

In all of the above-mentioned opportunities, Norway has shown an exemplary interest in contributing solutions to the difficult times lived in my country, always within a framework of the respect for human rights and the environment, with emphasis on social programs. We are very grateful and we value your interest from the bottom of our hearts.

The situation in Colombia is quite complex. It cannot be summarized in a few sentences nor is it my intention to do so at this time, but there is one thing I do want to make very clear: Our country has confronted for a very long time, alone, and with very few resources, the fight against the world drug problem. We have lost too many honest lives and spent overwhelming resources that should have gone to social investment.

Furthermore, this ominous drug business has become the main source of funds of illegal armed groups, who in turn breed violence, misery and unemployment throughout the country. Our people are the main victims in a vicious circle that brings them pain and despair, and that has destroyed over one million hectares of natural forests during the last 10 years, deforesting lands that today hold 10% of the world's biodiversity.

But this is everybody's problem. That is why we resort to the international community so it, guided by the concept of shared responsibility, helps us erase this scourge from the face of the earth. I urge all countries to form a common front: producers, consumers, countries that sell precursor chemicals, and those where these illegal moneys are laundered, to work together to fight against a situation that affects the future of our youth.

In this regard, I welcome the willingness of the government of Norway to contribute to the Strategy for Institutional Capacity-Building and Social Development designed by my

government to guide Colombia out of these difficult times. This strategy includes, among other objectives, increasing the State's institutional presence in far removed areas of the country; the substitution of illegal crops by legal crops, hand in hand with social and community development programs; the conservation of the environment; servicing the populations displaced by violence; the protection of human rights, and the achievement of peace through a dialogue process with rebel groups.

These multiple goals imply the simultaneous execution of large numbers of programs, and we are certain we can count on the effective support of the Norwegian people, a people who have historically assumed and delivered their share of responsibility in the solution of the world problems that affect mankind or the environment.

Mr. Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg and dear friends:

Alfred Nobel, whose Institute for Peace has its honorable seat in this beautiful city of Oslo, wrote the words that I wish to repeat today: *"The conquests of scientific research (...) brings*

us hope that microbes, of both the soul and body, will gradually be exterminated and that the only war that can free mankind in the future will be the war against these microbes”.

In Colombia we dream and work for the day in which the violence of the intolerant ceases and we can finally devote ourselves to build life instead of death. In Colombia we want to have thousands of scientists like Manuel Elkin Patarroyo, waging the only battle worth fighting: the war against microbes. I know that you, my friends of the Kingdom of Norway, will join us in this lofty goal.

It is in this spirit of fraternal cooperation that I raise my glass in friendship and solidarity, and I toast to you, Mr. Prime Minister, to all your kind guests, to the health and happiness of the people of Norway, and may our relations be blessed with good fortune.

Thank you very much.