

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF  
COLOMBIA AND PRO TEMPORE SECRETARY OF THE  
GROUP OF RIO, ANDRÉS PASTRANA, AT THE  
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Distinguished Chairmen and delegates

I come to this historic summit today not only as President of my country, but as the voice of 500 million inhabitants of this planet who live in 33 States of Latin America and the Caribbean who form the Group of Rio, of which I am today the Pro Tempore Secretary.

And in their name, I proclaim:

We aspire to be, above all, a region of peace.

We value the protection of human rights, in their integral application, and of the environment, since both are ways of defending man.

We reject all forms of intolerance and discrimination.

We exalt solidarity and cooperation as the value which should guide us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

And we therefore declare:

The United Nations is the most important world organization, and it is the duty of the peoples who form it to strengthen and increase its capacity to respond to the challenges and needs of mankind.

We defend a multilateralism which works on the principles of shared responsibility, of equality before the law, of transparency and of the democratization of international relations and which always acts within the framework of the United Nations as the prime regulator of world order.

By the same token we consider that any international action taken outside the legal framework of the Organization's Charter is unacceptable.

We must also strengthen the existing multilateral institutions, building schemes of cooperation between them and the various

regional institutions and moving towards a more democratic and participatory international system.

We believe it essential to fortify the Organs in the United Nations System which are engaged in the promotion and pursuit of the social agenda. There can be no reform which will be to the detriment of the social agenda of mankind.

Distinguished Chairmen:

We in Latin America and the Caribbean have a decisive commitment to democracy and the respect for human rights as the guiding principles of the new international order.

This is what we, the Presidents of the Group of Rio, asserted in Cartagena when we signed a Commitment to Democracy, and all the Presidents of South America ratified it less than a week ago in Brasilia.

With the authority to which we are entitled, as the first major region of the world to be free of nuclear weapons, Latin America and the Caribbean strives to create a world free of the nuclear threat and of other weapons of mass destruction. We

also expect the best possible results of the International Conference on Small Arms and Light Weapons to be held next year; and we condemn the use of excessively cruel and inhumane weapons, especially those of an improvised or “home-made” type, which should be banned from any kind of conflict.

We in Colombia and the Group of Rio invite all countries to ratify the Ottawa Convention, in order to eliminate anti-personnel mines for ever; and the Additional Protocol to the Convention on Children’s Rights on the Engagement of Minors in Armed Conflict.

As a priority and a matter of urgency, war must be avoided; but where conflict already exists, we must at least observe the rules of International Humanitarian Law. Colombia firmly believes in its postulates, and I am proud to be able to say that today there is no-one under age serving in our Armed Forces.

And in order to secure a firmer future for the generations to come, we must also show courage and determination in facing the world problem of unlawful drugs and related crimes such as

money-laundering, the traffic and diversion of precursors, contraband and arms-dealing.

The Group of Rio is convinced that this is a problem for all, and that it must be solved by all in a global effort which should be based on the principle of shared responsibility.

The people of Colombia have suffered more than any other from drug-trafficking, and have paid for it with the lives of their finest men and women and with appalling consequences for the economy and for the environment. ¡The price of this international crime has been far too high! So, we have called on the world to join in a common struggle to rid us all of the scourge of drugs: and our call is now finding a response.

Distinguished Chairmen

It is our duty to foster the conditions for the globalization process of the last ten years to be controlled and fair in human terms.

In these new circumstances, trade and finance cannot afford to lose sight of man and his needs. In Latin America and the

Caribbean there are more than 200 million poor who hope to share the benefits of progress, and we cannot leave them behind.

What we seek is growth with social equity.

For this, we need international cooperation to finance the networks of social protection and the investment in human capital and infrastructure.

We need to increase the flow of international trade, and put an end to the protectionist measures of the wealthier and more developed countries.

We need a just and lasting solution to the problem of foreign debt in poor economies.

In sum, we need a new architecture for the international financial system which will help to secure stability in financial and exchange markets, and provide assistance and support for countries which are in difficulties or undergoing a process of adjustment.

We thus support the United Nations High Level Meeting to be held next year on the major issue of development financing.

Distinguished Chairmen and representatives of the Nations of the world

I come from Colombia, a beautiful and green country, inhabited by 40 million people who love life, where, unfortunately and illogically, confrontation continues, fed by a few violent men and by the tainted money of the traffic in drugs which affects and involves the whole world.

But we are committed to the quest for a negotiated peace. We are possessed by a desire to achieve greater social justice for Colombians most in need. We are determined to combat drug-trafficking and to fight for human rights. We have been living in a democracy for over 180 years, and we will continue to do so, because the spirit of freedom and tolerance is with us.

We are the future. We are the promise. We are a land of hope and friendship.

Drawing on the spirit of the fallen heroes of our struggle, suffering the anguish of our poor, trusting in the talents of our people, we strive –as our Nobel Laureate Gabriel García Márquez has put it - for a second opportunity on this earth. ¡And I have no doubt that we shall obtain it!

Thank you very much