

ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF COLOMBIA, MR. ANDRES PASTRANA, DURING THE DINNER OFFERED BY THE MINISTER OF INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE KINGDOM OF NORWAY, ANNE KRISTIN SYDNES, AND BY THE SPECIAL ADVISOR TO THE UNITED NATIONS SECRETARY GENERAL FOR INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE TO COLOMBIA, JAN EGELAND

Oslo, April 23rd, 2001

“Society is like a ship and everyone must help steer it in the right direction.”

I find inspiration in the wise words of the renown Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen to express my deepest gratitude for the great honor I feel tonight sharing with you the warmth and generosity of the Norwegian people and, above all, to find myself in the company of the two people who have best understood the meaning of international solidarity and who have done everything in their power to help steer the ship of humanity in the right direction.

In effect, Madam Minister Anne Kristin Sydnes and Mr. Jan Egeland have proven with facts, and with their spirit to

serve, their commitment to mankind's best causes and, in our case, to achieve peace in Colombia.

It is no surprise that Norway, a country with a long standing democratic and humanitarian tradition, was one of the first countries to offer its concrete and effective assistance to my country during the first meeting of the Support Group of the Peace Process held in Madrid last July.

Nor is it surprising that the Special Advisor to the United Nations Secretary General for International Assistance to Colombia is Norwegian. He has proven for over a year now his absolute commitment to the achievement of peace and the execution of social, environmental, and humanitarian programs in my country.

Nor is it difficult to understand why the Kingdom of Norway is participating actively in the Colombian Peace Process, taking a stand of solidarity and cooperation like few others: a little over a year ago, Norway received the visit of a Delegation of Government and FARC negotiators who toured several European countries with the purpose of studying and looking at other development models; Norway

acted as one of the two facilitating countries during the International Public Hearing on the Environment and Crop Substitution held last June inside the *Detente* Zone with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia - FARC. Norway forms part of the Group of Friendly Nations that acted as the driving force in the talks with the National Liberation Army - ELN. Less than two months ago Norway also played a very active role in the ongoing process with the FARC, and now forms part of the Commission of Facilitating Countries.

As you can see, my dear friends, I am not exaggerating or expressing a simple formula of diplomatic courtesy when I tell you here, today, at this fraternal table, that Colombia has many reasons to be grateful with Norway, its government, and its people.

The people of Norway are lending a helping hand to the people of Colombia, and I have come here today to thank you for this noble gesture and to tell you that we continue counting on you to accompany us during the crucial times we are living in our country.

Jan Egeland, a man who knows us well, as only someone who looks at things with genuine interest and with affection in his heart can know us, has summarized the importance of the role to be played by international agencies and friendly nations in their cooperation with Colombia:

“Violence and human rights problems in the country, as well as the complexities of the peace process, must not lead the international community to distance itself from Colombia.

It must be born in mind that, in spite of the obstacles and difficulties that undoubtedly lie ahead, international support for the process of finding a negotiated solution is crucial for guaranteeing success”.

This is how things stand: Colombia is doing everything in its power to achieve internal peace, to provide social development to its citizens and marginated populations, and to combat on its soil the world drug problem, but it cannot do so alone.

Colombia needs the solidary cooperation of the international community so that we, guided by the concept

of shared responsibility, can build together a better future for our children.

We are intent on enforcing a culture of respect for human rights and international humanitarian law, in spite of the reluctance of a few intolerant people who, availing themselves of ideological pretexts or alleged justice, insist on walking the road of arms and violence against their brothers.

We are intent on building peace through political means, because we do not believe in a peace of victors and losers.

We are intent on rescuing the livelihood of our forests and jungle lands, because these are the legacy for our future and the future of mankind, a legacy that narcotrafficking has deforested in about one million hectares,.

We are intent on recovering the dignity in the lives of our people, farmers, native indians, displaced people, and the thousands and thousands of Colombians that are simply asking for the chance to have an honest job.

We hope to continue counting on the effective cooperation of the people of Norway in all these fronts, as has been the case to date. This cooperation could be further potentiated, if we work together with other countries in Europe and elsewhere, during the next meeting of the Support Group of the Peace Process to be held in Brussels.

Being with you here today, feeling your kind hospitality and your genuine interest in my country and in my people, I can end as I started, by remembering another phrase by Ibsen that summarizes the value of Norway's solidarity with Colombia: *"There is no mountain -my friends- high enough for two"*.

It is with this sentiment of solidarity that I toast tonight to the health of our joint effort. May solidarity inspires us at all times in our ascent along the mountain of prosperity and happiness of our peoples.

Thank you very much