

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF
COLOMBIA, MR. ANDRES PASTRANA, ON OCASSION OF
THE DELIVERY OF THE DICTIONARY ON THE
CONSTRUCTION AND REGIME OF THE SPANISH
LANGUAGE TO THE UNIVERSITY OF OSLO**

Oslo, April 24, 2001

Today I want to talk about a passionate story: The story of a young man from Bogota who was born in 1844 and who, still in his teenage years, spoke Latin, Greek, French, German and Portuguese, but was deeply in love with his native tongue: the Spanish language.

His name was Rufino José Cuervo who, at age 28, seduced by the charm of words, started the monumental task we see before us today: a dictionary of construction and regime that tells the origin and life of the main words of the Spanish language until present times. Cuervo knew that his effort was not “a task proportional to the forces of a single man”. But he trusted that, after his death, other lovers of language like himself would continue his monumental work.

And so it was. Thanks to the continuous dedication of Colombian intellectuals such as Father Félix Restrepo, José

Manuel Rivas, and Edilberto Cruz, among many others, who, from the Instituto Caro y Cuervo, devoted hours, days, months, and years to this almost endless task. Colombia is very proud to present you with these eight volumes today. This dictionary holds over 8,000 words and over 9,000 voices, which together constitute, according to the experts in this field, “the most important dictionary in the world” because of its exceptional characteristics.

This institute specialized in linguistic studies, located in the outskirts of Bogota, in an unparalleled bucolic and serene environment and has another venue in the traditional and historic center of La Candelaria, was awarded the year before last the Prince of Asturias Prize in Communications and Humanities, granted by an eminent jury comprised of renown experts of this language, who underlined “its extraordinary work addressed to knowledge, study, and dissemination of the Spanish language, particularly in its American varieties.”

These men and women, artisans and scientists of words give us a beautiful and thrilling example! Like the historian from Cartagena Eduardo Lemaitre used to say, it is good to know

that *“while the planet turns and turns like crazy and angrily, there is a place on earth, exactly in Colombia, where a few happy men devote their lives with religious uncton to the most peaceful of activities: philology”*.

And this is also recognized by the Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes, for whom the Instituto Caro y Cuervo of Colombia *“is the marvelous reserve of a metal that does not wear with use: the gold of intelligence, words and culture”*.

I can think of no better present from Colombia to a land of humanists like Norway, home of innovative men of letters like Ibsen and Hamsun, of genius musicians like Grieg, of impacting painters like Munch, and of audacious explorers like Amundsen.

This gift acquires greater importance because we know that it will be deposited with this prestigious university, whose research and education promotes and dignifies humanity. This is a gift from the world of letters to the world of academy!

Dear friends:

It is with great pride and affection that I present to the University of Oslo this Dictionary described by Gabriel García Márquez as “the greatest novel of words”: a novel written in the course of 125 years and which starting today forms part of the ties of friendship and affection that bond our two nations.

Thank you very much.