

**III SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS
FIRST PLENARY SESSION**

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PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF COLOMBIA**

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I represent, with pride, a country which stands up for democracy. A people which has not only lived in democracy for 181 years but has also been ready to fight the good fight to consolidate and strengthen it, within our borders and throughout the continent.

Colombia, in the face of the winds of destruction blown by senseless violence and unlawful drugs, has always maintained its adherence to solutions in law. And our strength is our unwavering faith in the principles of freedom and democracy.

We have suffered greatly. We have suffered the havoc of violence, but our democracy has not been brought to its knees. It lives on, eager to become ever stronger, ever more transparent.

And you can be sure of that. If democracy in Colombia were weak, it would already be a thing of the past. But that is where our strength lies, with the free and decisive participation of our people in political decisions and in our republican institutions.

Today, as the nations of the Americas come together in this first year of the third millennium, we may congratulate ourselves for having made democracy the dominant system in

our region. Now we have the base on which to build economic growth, social equity and peace.

Colombia's commitment to democracy and to the rules and mechanisms to preserve and refine it, provided by the Organization of American States and other regional organizations, such as the Rio Group and the Andean Community, and global programs, is today firmer than ever. We offer our determined support to the initiative to articulate all these efforts in one grand chart for us to follow our course, collecting up the various instruments of the Americas to defend and promote democracy, and putting them in order.

My country is a link in the long chain of democracy in the Americas. A strong and secure link, which faces up with courage to the threats which surround it and try to strangle its future.

Colombia has been the victim of a world problem, unlawful drugs, and of internal conflict which feeds upon it; but Colombia does not give up its right to live and progress in peace, nor its obligation to help build greater solidarity into the Inter-American system.

Unlike those in some other parts of the world in the past, the groups which generate violence in Colombia are not struggling to deliver the people from a tyranny or a dictatorship, ruled by violations of human rights. Our conflict has been stirred up by minority groups who have wrongly resorted to the force of arms, and who have provoked unthinking violence in their opposition to a State and a society in which the majority is convinced that democracy and its peaceful methods of reform is the better way.

In Colombia today we live at a crucial moment in which civil society is offering the armed groups a chance to incorporate themselves into the democratic system, by political and civilian means, and to cut free from their links with the drug-traffickers whose resources have helped to fuel all this violence and the debasement of our conflict.

In this, I have been following the mandate of my fellow-countrymen in taking the lead in a peace process which seeks a political solution to the internal conflict. But we must be realistic about it: while the world problem of drugs continues to be rooted in our countries, choking us with its long tentacles, any effort of ours will be drowned by its enormous power to corrupt and destroy.

Heads of State and Heads of Government

The problem of unlawful drugs – and the implied threat to our democratic systems and the fabric of our societies – is not a problem for Colombia alone. Its epicenter lies in each and every one of our countries which in one way or another form part of the chain of death and grief.

The consequences, which Colombia suffers today more than any other country, are a hidden danger to the whole continent. Not because Colombia is a danger – indeed, it is essentially a victim and a combatant – but because every country harbors one or another symptom of this global disease.

It is important that each State should stop looking only at the others, and should recognize its share of the responsibility, before it is too late, so that between us we will have a strong and integrated strategy to combat unlawful drugs.

It is time to admit that no individual or even subregional effort will be strong enough to face a scourge of these dimensions on its own. We must therefore increase the power of the Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism and give our strategy not only an effective operational structure but also an instance of political and judicial cooperation at the highest level so that analysis and follow-up will be assured .

We must also make the crop-substitution process economically and socially sustainable so that the small-farmers in the countries affected can earn a fair income from growing legal produce.

In this, Colombia, like all countries who have watched the seeds of drugs spring from their soil, needs the opportunities which open and equitable trade will bring, allowing it to steer its economy onto the right course and to face the new imbalances of globalization.

Our country looks forward to the completion of the FTAA negotiations, so that the FTAA will come into force in 2005. With the same eagerness, we trust that freedom of trade will allow for preferential access to markets for products derived from alternative development programs.

Only if this happens, and if we have an integrated strategy against drugs, with international cooperation and equitable terms of trade, can we make common progress against an enemy, a disease whose germ lurks in every house, and which could become the strongest factor in the destabilization of democracies in our continent.

My colleagues of the Americas;

I am also convinced that to strengthen democracy it is necessary to achieve the economic stability and growth that ensure true human development. ~~Mi capital político, mi esfuerzo y mi espíritu enteros los he destinado a buscar la paz de mi país y a combatir, con el apoyo de la comunidad internacional, el problema mundial de las drogas.~~

~~La democracia colombiana, tan antigua y constante como pocas, necesita para crecer y consolidarse de un Estado que haga presencia en todo el territorio, que sea garantía de seguridad para todos los habitantes y donde la fuerza de la ley esté al servicio del orden y la justicia.~~

~~Para ello requerimos fortalecer las fuerzas armadas legítimas de Colombia, y lo estamos haciendo, al tiempo que promovemos el mayor respeto por los derechos humanos y el Derecho Internacional Humanitario.~~

~~No se nos puede pedir que combatamos a las mayores organizaciones criminales del mundo en un esfuerzo individual y aislado o sin los recursos necesarios, tanto financieros como logísticos y jurídicos. Por eso estamos convocando a todos los países de América a respaldar nuestra lucha y nuestro proceso de paz. Por eso estamos fortaleciendo el Estado e incrementando la inversión social en los más necesitados, con los ojos puestos también en el contexto regional.~~

~~El Estado de Derecho en Colombia, y 40 millones de demócratas que lo respaldan, está vigilante, sin doblegarse, fuerte y valiente ante las adversidades.~~

~~La democracia colombiana requiere del firme acompañamiento de sus vecinos americanos, como un factor de unión y no de conflicto, de cooperación y no de querellas.~~

~~Requiere la condena unánime de los actos violentos de las fuerzas irregulares, el comercio equitativo y la inversión con espíritu social, como las mejores herramientas para reforzar su base de apoyo.~~

~~Yo creo que, entre todos, podemos garantizar un porvenir libre de violencia y de drogas a los hijos del continente americano.~~ Our societies demand a clear and firm answer from those of us who have the responsibility of leading them. An answer that simultaneously guarantees societies' long-term well-being and meets its basic needs for survival.

It is paramount for us to be realistic: When these needs are not met, it is very difficult to believe in the long term! When hunger, misery, and unemployment strike, it is very difficult to believe in the structural, and it is very easy to fall for irresponsible populism!

We must avoid the temptation of falling for short-term populism and the arrogance of thinking in structural solutions only, while our people suffer and wait. If there presently abound populist options or if social discontent grows, it is because of the political clumsiness of not having known how to balance the present with the future.

When some offer this world and heaven too immediately, they are sacrificing a future of prosperity for their people. And nothing is more dangerous for democracy than this irresponsible populism. The return to this radical populism has proven, in the course of history, to be fateful for Latin American democracies.

On the other side of the scale we find those that plead we think of the future only, forgetting that our peoples' needs cannot wait. The advocates of structural reform or the famous

consensus of Washington must understand that an intransigent position, distant from social reality, has always been, and can become again, the genesis of critical or dangerous situations. Our America is full of present and we can not turn our back on it!

What I have sought in my government, and what I propose to all American governments, is that we move closer to a mid-point between the urgency of filling short term voids and the importance of building stable growth on the long run.

iIntelligent orthodoxy! iSensible orthodoxy! No first, second or third way, rather the only way: the way to balance long and short term measures; a fair mid point between structural reform and social justice. There lies the true foundation of democracy.

I believe in economic orthodoxy. I have fought for its defense like no others have, in an environment far more complex than any of yours. But I do not believe in political shortsightedness. That is why I am intent on finding a balance between the urgent and the important, between the advisable and the absolutely necessary.

Policy, my policy, the policy I propose to you, is the art of balancing the present with the future.

If we fight together, my dear friends, if we work in close cooperation, the future we are building today will in the end be tailored to our dreams!

Thank you very much