

TALKING POINTS

CLOSING PLENARY SESSION: “FROM CONFLICT TO PEACE”

New York, February 4th., 2002

- I would like to tell you what Colombia is and what is happening there, but I want to do it in such a way that you may understand it just the way it should be understood: from the right perspective.
- When people talk about my country many think of it in a simplistic way: civil war and drug traffic.
- Others take it in a more business-oriented stride: coffee and flowers.
- Others can remember the fantastic novels of Gabriel Garcia Marquez, the paintings and sculptures of Fernando Botero, the recent musical successes of Shakira, or the victories of Juan Pablo Montoya in the great automobile racing circuits.
- My first task, thus, is to clarify – to put in perspective – these first, simplistic approach that circumscribes Colombia, just as in a bad TV movie, to the concept of war and drugs.
- In Colombia we are not engaged in a civil war, but in a war waged by a few against civil society.

- We don't have a struggle between two or more factions which would be relatively similar and endowed with a high degree of representation.
- The internal conflict that, unfortunately, has been burdening our nation for almost four decades is fostered by a very small group of people whose number do not even reach 0.1 per cent of the Colombian population. They have erroneously chosen the way of armed strife and violence, be it as guerrillas or as illegal self-defense groups.
- What we, the remaining 99.9 per cent of the Colombians, do through the legitimate forces of our institution - that is, through our Armed Forces – is to defend ourselves against that constant and unjustified aggression. In so doing we always respect Human Rights and abide by the rules set forth in International Humanitarian Law.
- During my whole administration, I have strived to reach with the subversive groups a solution to the conflict through dialogue and political negotiation.
- In this I have been fully supported by the various political and social forces of the country, and I have followed the mandate Colombians gave me through the polls.

- It hasn't been easy nor swift – because these processes are neither easy nor swift – but we have never given up this will of peace in which, moreover, we have had the company and support of the international community which is even more conscious of the real situation of the Colombian conflict and who actively demands from the illegal groups to stop the assassinations, the kidnappings, the planting of anti-personal mines and the attacks to innocent civilian populations, among other practices against International Humanitarian Law.
- Today we are in a process of negotiation with the FARC, which has overcome a series of huge obstacles, and we are working on consolidating the dialogue with the ELN rebel group.
- Actually, in the last couple of weeks, the peace process underway with the FARC underwent the most difficult crisis as a result of their insistence to negotiate amidst conflict, without contributing any acts of peace to the process.
- When we were about to end the process, the timely help of the international community, through the UN Secretary General's Representative and the Ambassadors of friendly nations, managed to have the Farc accept to agree to a timetable with specific dates for diminishing and humanizing the conflict.

- Today we trust that this timetable, and the increased participation of the international community, acting as overseer and guarantor of the agreements, will give peace a new opportunity to yield better results soon.
- In this regard I always apply the thoughts of my esteemed Nelson Mandela, who I admire greatly, and who wrote in his memoirs a phrase that has inspired all my peace efforts: *“In the beginning people do not believe that the peace process is off to a serious start, yet all is lost without peace. Peace is only credible when it overcomes the reasons that generate violence”*.
- The objective of peace has always guided, and will always guide, my actions as Head of State, because I am fully aware that it is only through peace that we can reach true social justice.
- But peace rests also in the strengthening and professional drive of a Public Armed Force that is the warrant of the solidity of the democratic institutions.
- This is why, during these last three years, we have been strengthening, as never before, Colombia’s Armed Forces, increasing the number of soldiers, the technological and transportation equipment, improving their capacity and training them in the respect of Human Rights and the compliance with International Humanitarian Law.

- Colombia has now the strongest and most professional Armed Forces in its history. They are ready to confront the violent, but, above all, they are ready to work for the cause of peace and the defense of the civil society. It is not a mere coincidence that they are presently the institution with the widest popular support in the country.
- Colombia has been, and continues being, a bulwark of democracy, and of both political and economic stability in Latin America.
- Like any democracy, it has had and still has its flaws. But we have always worked with the will to overcome them, without taking the road of authoritarianism.
- The government I have the honor of presiding was elected in an electoral process whose transparency has not been put in doubt by anyone, registering the highest vote in our history. My predecessor, a member of the opposite party, handed power over to us with no traumatism or setbacks. The different branches of our public powers operate independently and autonomously, and control agencies discharge their obligations in complete independence.
- Ladies and Gentlemen: If democracy were weak in Colombia, it would have already disappeared! Our force lies precisely in our faith in its values.

- Unfortunately, violence in Colombia is also exacerbated by the evil interests of and financing by narcotics traffickers who breed death and corruption throughout the globe.
- This is a world problem, and the international community cannot leave Colombia on its own. You and I know that we can only solve this problem if we confront it together, guided by the principle of shared responsibility.
- Narcotics trafficking, and the immense economic resources it produces, has been the main catalyst of violence in my country; it has distributed large sums of money among different social sectors, nurturing intense cycles of corruption; it has displaced the traditional agricultural geography of our country with illegal crops, and its expansion has fostered the colonization of new territories.
- My government has designed an integral strategy aimed at strengthening our institutions and increasing social investment.
- This strategy also seeks, among other things, to provide productive alternatives to those farmers presently engaged in growing coca leaf or poppy seed for their subsistence.
- This strategy -which also includes the peace process, improving the justice system, servicing the people displaced by violence,

programs for disseminating and protecting human rights, and building social infrastructure works- has received the enthusiastic support of several countries and international agencies.

- Colombia, in spite of lacking the resources required to confront this threat, has never given in to it. On the contrary, we have sacrificed an important number of our best men and women and diverted important sums of money that should have been invested in social development. The country has assumed with great dignity and courage its share of a crime that is clearly international in nature.
- I am not exaggerating when I say that for every line of cocaine snorted in Europe, the United States or elsewhere in the world, there is one death in Colombia!
- However, as we manage to balance the burden of confronting this crime equitably, Colombia must continue its historic trend of consolidating and strengthening the social rule of law that will allow it to connect to the globalized world of the twenty first century.
- My government has worked relentlessly to this end, assuming with courage each and every challenge imposed on it at this juncture. We are tackling every aspect of this problem with decision and, above all, with a long-term view, building our future amidst much incomprehension and sacrifice.

- I know, and the people of Colombia know, that peace is possible, and we will continue working for the future we deserve.

Thank you very much