



Keeping Promises Among Partners

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Real Clear Politics Op-Ed

July 24, 2008

In any partnership, the coin of the realm is trust and responsibility - in other words, saying what you mean and doing what you say. In the dramatic rescue on July 2 of 15 hostages, including three Americans, held captive for many years by guerrillas and terrorists, deep in the Colombian jungles, we saw a powerful reminder that the United States has no better partner in South America than the government and people of Colombia.

Colombia's leaders, especially President Uribe, had promised us that our three abducted citizens would be treated no differently than the many Colombian men and women who shared their fate. Colombia never wavered in this promise, and never cut any side deals with the guerrillas that could have freed their citizens at the expense of ours. This was not an easy act of solidarity, but Colombia remained true to its word.

In the breathtaking rescue mission, carried out with the utmost skill and professionalism (and without a shot being fired) by the Colombian Armed Forces, our partners did great honor to themselves - and a great service to us. We will never forget that. Nor will we forget the many Colombians who still have not found rescue from their guerrilla captors.

That our Colombian partners made good on their promise in this instance is important enough, but this is not the exception; it is the norm.

More than a decade ago, with its country wracked by the worst insurgency in the hemisphere, with its economy contracting, and with its democratic state on the brink of failure, Colombia resolved to turn the tide. Its government and people set out an ambitious plan to secure and expand their country's democratic development, and they asked for our support - political, economic, diplomatic, and military. Starting under President Clinton, expanding under President Bush, and with bipartisan support in Congress all along the way, the United States has fully backed Colombia in meeting its bold promises of success. And the results speak for themselves.

Our Colombian partners said that they would win their fight against domestic terrorism and reclaim their country. Today they are.

They said they would combat social exclusion in Colombia by building the capacity and expanding the reach of their democracy. Today they are.

They said they would open their markets, trade freely and fairly, fuel economic growth, and create opportunities for social justice for all of their citizens. Today they are.

And our Colombian partners said they would protect the lives of all of their citizens, including trade unionists, and bring murderers and criminals to justice. Today violent crime has plummeted, law and order is expanding, and President Uribe's government has taken the courageous step of extraditing 15 major drug traffickers and paramilitary leaders to the United States to stand trial in our courts for their crimes against our citizens.

Colombia has done all of this - and more. And the United States has supported them every step of the way. With the momentum of more than a decade's worth of shared progress at our backs, with Colombia on the cusp of self-sustained and lasting stability, and with Democrats and Republicans having shown that they can implement a long-term bipartisan strategy to achieve a critical national interest - the success of a democratic Colombia - now is the last time that we should begin going back on our word to Colombia. And yet that is exactly what we risk doing if Congress fails to pass the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement.

In addition to being a slap in the face to our Colombian partners, sacrificing this trade agreement at the altar of domestic politics would be no favor to U.S. workers. More than 90 percent of Colombian goods now enter the United States duty-free, while our exports to Colombia face tariffs of up to 35 percent. This agreement would level the playing field for our workers, so they could send the products of their labor to Colombia on the same terms that Colombians now send theirs to us.

Passing this trade agreement will be a culmination and realization of our partnership with Colombia. It will help the Colombian government and people to lock in their democratic and economic reforms. It will signal that Colombia, like a growing number of our fellow democracies in the Americas today, is a reliable place to invest and poised to compete effectively in the global economy. It will affirm that the future of our hemisphere belongs to democratic citizens, of the left and the right, who want their elected leaders to govern justly and lawfully, to expand economic freedom and trade, and to invest in their people. And it will send a message across the world that the United States will honor the promises we make to our friends and allies.

Colombia has stood by us. We have stood by them. And we have succeeded together. Now is not the time to jeopardize the fruits of our partnership, but to consolidate them. Now is the time to keep our word to Colombia, just as they have kept their word to us. Anything less is no way for a great nation to conduct itself - and no way to repay a faithful partner.

Released on July 24, 2008

 [BACK TO TOP](#)

Published by the U.S. Department of State Website at <http://www.state.gov> maintained by the Bureau of Public Affairs.