



## Press Conference in Bogota, Colombia

**Marc Grossman, Under Secretary for Political Affairs**

Bogota, Colombia  
March 5, 2003

**Statement by Colombian Minister of Foreign Affairs Carolina Barco:** I only wanted to welcome Under Secretary Marc Grossman again and to state how positive his meeting was this morning with President Uribe

**UNDER SECRETARY GROSSMAN:** Minister, thank you very much. Let me first of all apologize to all of you for keeping you waiting. We had a very good meeting with President Uribe. As we did some months ago when we were here, we had a lot to talk about, and it took a little bit of extra time. So, I apologize for any inconvenience to you.

I also want to thank you all for coming out here today. I thank the Minister, President Uribe, all of our Colombian hosts for their warm hospitality. And as I have done each time in the past, I want to pay tribute to Ambassador Anne Patterson and her Embassy for the outstanding job that they do representing the United States in Colombia. I am particularly pleased today to also have with us SouthCom Commander General Tom Hill and senior representatives of the State Department and the Defense Department.

I want today, before I do anything else, to express the solidarity of the United States of America with the people of Colombia. On my way to the Presidential Palace this morning I had a chance to visit El Nogal. And it's so clear that the United States and Colombia are both victims of terrorism.

As many of you know, and I recognize so many familiar faces, this is my fourth visit to Colombia. As you've heard me say, I come to Colombia because Colombia matters to the United States. We support Colombia's struggle to defend its democracy. Together we are producing results in our joint effort against drug trafficking, in our efforts to promote peace, in our efforts to promote justice and human rights, and in our efforts, jointly, to bring more prosperity to the Colombian people.

If I might just say to you that I made a list of the things that I think have been accomplished since I was here last August:

- President Uribe visited Washington in September, Secretary Powell visited Bogotá in December, and my visit today, and we want those visits to highlight the U.S. commitment to help Colombians defeat narcoterrorism.
- I believe that our joint counternarcotics efforts are producing results. You all, I am sure, saw the announcement last week by ONDCP Chief John Walters that Colombia's coca crop fell 15 percent in 2002, marking the first drop in almost a decade. We always say when we are in Colombia that we recognize the responsibility that Americans have for this drug problem. It is we and others who use this poison. But together, Colombians and Americans are making progress. President Uribe lifted limits on aerial eradication, leading to the spraying of over 43,000 hectares of coca in the first four months of his presidency. For the year 2002, U.S.-funded spray planes sprayed over 122,000 hectares of coca and 3,300 hectares of opium poppy. We plan to do even more in 2003. Our program is starting to make a difference. It's making a difference not just on the eradication side but also in terms of alternative development. We are keeping illicit drugs off the streets of United States of America and I believe that we are denying the FARC, and the ELN, and the AUC the funds that they have taken from being part of the drug trade.
- Our joint efforts in combating terrorism are also producing results. We are providing: \$5 million in assistance to train and equip the Presidential and other security details; \$25 million to train Colombia units to prevent and resolve kidnappings, and \$93 million to train and equip a human rights-vetted Colombian unit to protect the key Cano-Limon oil pipeline. And, there as well we are seeing results because the number of attacks on that pipeline has been reduced dramatically from 170 in 2001 to 41 in 2002, and only 6 attacks, so far this year. That means more revenue for the Government of Colombia and less environmental damage to the area.
- Last year Congress passed the enhanced Andean Trade Preferences Act (ATPA), which provides a significant boost to the Colombian economy. According to the Colombian Government, ATPA will create between 100-150,000 new jobs in the textile sector and generate about \$ 200 million a year in exports by the end of 2004.
- As I said, in the area of antinarcotics there is eradication but there are also the questions about alternative development. We've produced results there by supporting almost 12,000 hectares of licit crops in coca and poppy growing regions, aiding almost 17,000 rural families, and we have created and completed almost 150 small-scale social infrastructure projects to strengthen civic involvement in local government.
- Important too is the work we are doing with the Ministry of Interior, and we have provided protection to 2,221 human rights defenders, labor activists, and journalists since May of 2001.
- We have also spent almost \$71.5 million trying to help the large number of displaced people that there are in Colombia.

During this short visit, as our hostess said, I had the opportunity to meet with President Uribe, the Foreign Minister, the Defense Minister, and Peace Commissioner Restrepo here this morning, and yesterday as some of you know I had a chance to visit as I have done on each of my visits to Colombia, with human rights activists and private sector leaders.

In my meeting with the President, I had the opportunity to thank him, the Colombian Government, and the Colombian Military for the courageous efforts by Colombian troops to locate three American citizens taken captive by the FARC after their plane made an emergency landing near Florencia on Feb. 13. The FARC executed two crewmembers of that aircraft, one Colombian and one American. And I join all of the others who have expressed their deep regret and sorrow to the families of these men, and express our condolences to all Colombians who have suffered at the hands of terrorists such as the FARC.

The President and I agreed that although this effort to find these Americans is generating a lot of publicity, it is kidnapping of course that is the evil here and something that Colombians and Americans need to work together to end.

I would say that if there were any doubts about the true intentions of the FARC, the Nogal and Neiva bombings put them to rest by claiming the lives together of 53 innocent civilians and injuring another 192 – many of them women and children.

On February 12, a special session of the Permanent Council of the Organization of American States approved a strong resolution condemning the El Nogal terrorist attack by the FARC and reaffirming the commitment of the OAS to find those responsible for this terrible act. OAS Resolution 837 is the first formal hemispheric consensus condemning the terrorist threat posed by Colombia's illegal armed groups. And I had a chance to commend the President and the Foreign Minister for the initiative to go to the OAS and get this resolution passed. The resolution highlights the threat posed by the nexus between terrorism and narcotrafficking. The next day, also at Colombia's initiative, the United Nations Security Council condemned the attack.

This is a regional problem. I had the chance to tell the Minister and to tell the President how much we supported their effort to draw together regional foreign and defense

ministers here in Bogota next week to support a regional answer to a regional problem of regional terrorism.

President Uribe and I agreed, of course, that we have more to do together in all areas. We discussed the way ahead. I believe that together the results we have produced, that we are producing, and that we will produce will help Colombians defend their freedom, their democracy and their prosperity.

Thank you for listening to that statement and I'd be very glad to take any questions anyone might have.

**Andres Mompotes, El Tiempo:** You have just announced that you are supporting the efforts of Colombia at the summit of the Defense and Foreign Affairs ministers that will take place in Colombia. Is it feasible to have a regional security strategy for Colombia, bearing in mind that a lot of neighboring countries have reservations regarding Plan Colombia? What would be say to neighboring countries in this regard?

**UNDER SECRETARY GROSSMAN:** First, I leave the specific plan and request and conversations to the Ministers and to the President. I'm sure that they will make the right decisions about what to ask for. What I support is the recognition on the part of all regional countries, that this is not a problem just for Colombia. The FARC and the other illegal armed groups are also a threat to the sovereignty of your neighbors. It is their borders too that are being violated, not just Colombia's borders that are being violated. So, I would hope that an outcome of this meeting -again, the Foreign Minister may have some other ideas- is to heighten the consciousness of all of Colombia's neighbors that they face a threat too; that this isn't a problem just of Colombia. I also would hope that those countries, all of whom are members of the OAS, and who voted for the OAS Resolution, will now sit down and try to create some practical plan forward. It's one thing to vote for a resolution, it's then another thing to come and say, "This is what we're going to do."

And I would hope that under the leadership of the Colombian Government, as the convenor of this conference, that some practical measures might be accomplished.

**Susan Abad, El Comercio-Peru:** The kidnapping of the American citizens by the FARC again raises the problem of the use of civilian companies in the Colombian conflict. Have you thought of reassessing the participation of civilians in the Colombian conflict?

**UNDER SECRETARY GROSSMAN:** No, we have not. We believe that contractors -people on contract to the U.S. Government- will continue to be a very important part of our effort here. That is how the modern world works. We have said from the very beginning of all of these efforts that this is very dangerous work, and that the people we hire and the people we train and the people we ask to do this work on behalf of Colombia and America, know it's dangerous. And so, as I say, I feel great sorrow and great condolence for the people who were killed; we are doing everything we can along with Colombia to find the three people who have been kidnapped; but no, it does not make us reassess who we hire and how we hire them. We believe the contractors will continue to be an important part of our effort here.

**Leslie Esparza, BBC:** Mr. Grossman, you haven't spoken about the U.S. support to Colombia. In that order of ideas, could you please confirm how many U.S. Special Forces are at the moment here in Colombia? And, could you please confirm, whether they are involved, or ever will be involved in any rescue operation of the three U.S. citizens allegedly captured by the FARC?

**UNDER SECRETARY GROSSMAN:** Well, let me make three points. First of all, that there are, as you know, caps on the number of people, both contractors and American government officials, who can be in Colombia at any one time. And there is no one who is advocating the breaking of those caps. What we did was, we needed to bring extra people in here to assist the Government of Colombia in the search effort, and we have done that. Not a large number of people, but it's an important number of people. And we went to our Congress and we said, just as the law allows, that in an emergency we were going to go over this cap. So we have done that. But I want to make clear that we are not looking for ways to put more people in here. This is a Colombian problem that Colombians will have to solve. Second, we have Special Forces here, and I apologize, the number slips my mind at the moment, training now for the units that are protecting the Cano-Limon pipeline. We'll get you that number. Third, what happens in the future about our three hostages, I cannot say. We're looking for them; the Colombian Government has made every effort to find them. If there has to be an operation, it seems to me most likely to be a Colombian operation. And so I don't speculate about the future. One thing I can tell you, though, is President Uribe's great determination to find these people and to bring the perpetrators of this crime to justice.

**Juan Fernando Tavares, RCN TV:** The Colombian Government has said in recent days, as it has said even in previous administrations that there has been some difficulty because of the presence of Colombian guerrillas in Venezuelan territory. You just said that the FARC are a regional threat. Recently, some media in the U.S. have said that the FARC Commander Manuel Marulanda -Tirofijo- is in Venezuela. What is the U.S. Government's understanding of collaboration and support by the Venezuelan Government for the Colombian terrorists?

**UNDER SECRETARY GROSSMAN:** President Uribe made this part of our conversation just now. And I know that he has been in close contact with the Venezuelan authorities as has the Foreign Minister. And I know the Foreign Minister, if I may say, hopes that the Venezuelans will come to this meeting next week, to show that they recognize that this is a regional question. I, actually, and he obviously could speak for himself, I was interested in the report that President Uribe gave us, that on the border, there is actually quite a lot of good work going on between Colombian and Venezuelan military units. This, of course, is an area that is very hard to govern, and it's an area that's very hard to control. But the fact that the Venezuelans the other day turned over members of the FARC, that there is this conversation going on at the local level, seemed to President Uribe to be a positive thing. And I said that it sounded positive to me as well. Last point on this issue, actually, two more points, one is, I think you should know that in our conversations with Venezuela, as with all of the regional countries, we have tried to support the view of the Colombian Government that all countries should be doing all they can to cut off the ability of the illegal armed groups to move back and forth. And then finally, as to the first gentleman's question, Venezuela is an important member of the Organization of American States; it is a member of the United Nations General Assembly, and so the fact that the OAS has now voted a resolution that says, "Stop these illegal armed groups," and Venezuela voted for that resolution and as a member of the United Nations, I think will have some important effects. I certainly hope so.

**Ruth Morris, L.A. Times:** You have said that if there has to be an operation to rescue the American hostages held by the FARC it would be a Colombian operation, but would you rule out U.S. direct participation in such a rescue operation?

**UNDER SECRETARY GROSSMAN:** I don't think anyone on the Colombian side or the American side would rule anything in or out. But, by that, I don't want you to speculate about what the answer is. We don't know the answer to this question, and we won't know the answer to the question until we have some more facts. So, I never take anything off the table, and I don't think, with respect, I don't think the Government of Colombia would take anything off the table either.

**Juan Carlos Mateus, Caracol TV:** The FARC has said that the three Americans could be traded. That they are essentially part of the larger group of kidnapped Colombians, including former candidates. How does the U.S. view this statement by the FARC?

**UNDER SECRETARY GROSSMAN:** I think it's outrageous that people kidnap Colombians or foreigners, and then hold them against their will and then say, "Oh, well, we'd like to trade them for something." I think that's, I don't know how to comment on that, I find it so reprehensible. And so, the idea that the FARC would say, "Oh, well these people have this title, the Americans have that title..." I'm not interested in any of those things. I'm interested in the return of these three people, safely, without being harmed, and immediately. And for the rest of it, I find it incomprehensible.

**Alexandra Farfán, Tiempos del Mundo:** Moving aside from the topic on the kidnapped Americans, what joint efforts are the U.S. and Colombia carrying out to cut the financial sources of the illegal armed groups, a key element in the fight against terrorism?

**UNDER SECRETARY GROSSMAN:** An excellent question, thank you very much. The first way that people are going after the finances of these groups is to attack the drug trade. And to attack the connection between narcotics and terrorism. And I believe that over the next few months we are all going to

be able to see more and more of where we've been able by a 15% reduction in coca planting, through interdiction, through the work of the Counternarcotics Brigade in Colombia to cut off some of the money that goes to these groups. So, that's the first thing. The second thing is, I believe the last time we were all together, perhaps it was you who asked the question, I still think that Colombian and American efforts to put these groups up with those that we are fighting in U.N. Security Council Resolution 1373, about financing of terrorism, is a tremendously important way forward. I mean, one of the things that is worth remembering here is we didn't wake up to the FARC being a terrorist organization the day our citizens were kidnapped. The FARC has been a foreign terrorist organization listed by the United States for many years, as has the ELN, as has the AUC. That allows us, because they're on this list, to attack their finances. And so Colombians, Americans, and everyone who believes in U.N. Security Council Resolution 1373 ought to be doing exactly as you propose.

**William Parra, Reuters:** You were speaking in your statement about aerial spraying. There are many farmers in many areas of Colombia, particularly in Putumayo, who have come up with proposals for manual eradication of illegal crops. What is the interest of the U.S.? To continue with spraying? In that regard some allegations have been received from farmers who say that instead of increasing the concentration of glyphosate, the U.S. is actually using (the biological agent) Fusarium to attack the crops. And, do you see any possibility of establishing some kind of dialogue with the FARC even if you consider them terrorists?

**UNDER SECRETARY GROSSMAN:** I do not see the possibility of establishing a dialogue with the FARC, no. And to answer the further question, I don't see a negotiation with the FARC for our hostages. So, "No" and "No" are the answers to those questions.

In terms of eradication and spraying, the interest of the United States is, I believe, and the interest of the Government of Colombia, is to stop the growing of poppy and stop the growing of coca in Colombia. And we believe that the way to do that is to spray; to manually eradicate, fine, wherever that is useful and successful and effective; and also to pursue a very effective and aggressive program of alternative development.

And I have come to believe that you can't do one without the other. It's no good just to spray, because what does that produce? It's no good just to manually eradicate, because you can't get enough hectares. It's no good just to have alternative development, because there's no hammer, there's no spray, out there to say, "You're going to stop growing this poison." And so I think the three things work together.

As for the allegations that have been around now for so many years about the spraying, here's my take:

1. We have yet to have one credible allegation of a health risk from this chemical. Ambassador Patterson, a couple of years ago, sent the best doctors in Colombia to listen to anyone who had a story, and not one of those stories panned out to have anything to do with glyphosate.
2. The first time I was here I promised all of you in a press conference that we would get a third party to come and look at this issue, and the OAS did that, and there is no problem here.
3. And I would say to you, finally, that I believe that the true environmental damage done is done by those people who are in the drug business. Why? Because they slash and burn the rainforest, they dump their chemicals in the rivers, they pollute the areas in which they use gasoline and kerosene. And so, environmental damage, I say, that belongs to the drug dealers; medical damage, I say, no proof. Our interest is, and I believe the Colombian interest is, a successful eradication project, which requires spraying, eradication, and alternative development.

Thank you very much.

Released on March 6, 2003

