



## Remarks After Meeting with Colombian President Alvaro Uribe

**Secretary Colin L. Powell**

Washington, DC

September 30, 2003

**SECRETARY POWELL:** It's been a great pleasure to welcome President Uribe back to the State Department. We just had a good discussion. I'm also pleased to have his Foreign Minister and his Minister of Defense with him, Foreign Minister Barco and [Defense] Minister Ramirez, and, of course, our good friend the Colombian Ambassador. And we were joined in our discussions by our Director of Narcotics and Drug Control Programs John Walters.

We began our conversation by my congratulating the President on the speech he delivered at the United Nations General Assembly earlier today, and I was impressed as he cataloged for the world, for the international community, all the successes that Colombia has had in the past year in reducing violence, in destroying illicit crops throughout the country. And I was also impressed in his speech by his clear commitment to human rights in the prosecution of this war that he is fighting against terrorists and against drug lords in Colombia.

We noted the progress that we have made in eradication in the recent months, and we were also pleased to note that the Airbridge Denial Program is again up and working, and working very effectively.

We discussed the continuing tragedy of terrorist organizations in Colombia taking people to be hostages -- innocent people -- and I know that the President is doing everything in his power, and his ministers and all parts of the Colombian police and law enforcement establishment are doing everything they can to try to seek the release, get the release of these people who have been taken hostage.

I also expressed my thanks to the President for Colombia entering into an Article 98 agreement with the United States with respect to the International Criminal Court. Article 98 agreements are provided for under the Rome statute, and even though we have different positions with respect to the International Criminal Court, we have a basis upon which to respect each other's interests, but nevertheless continue the fine level of cooperation that exists between United States personnel in Colombia and the Colombian Government.

Mr. President, and my colleagues, it's a great pleasure to have you here at the State Department and back in the United States. Please, sir.

**QUESTION:** Thank you, Mr. Secretary. It has been very important, our meeting. This meeting has given us the opportunity to reaffirm our coalition to defeat drugs, to overcome terrorists. Your country has been a very practical ally in our cause, and our cause is on behalf not only of Colombians, but on behalf of all the people in the worldwide.

With your help, we have the possibility to show results. However, the problem is alive. We need to work harder until the day we can say to the world: "Colombia is free of drugs. Colombia is free of terrorism. The people of Colombia now have the opportunity to live peacefully, to work with confidence, and to enjoy our democratic system fully."

**SECRETARY POWELL:** Time for a question or two.

**QUESTION:** Secretary Powell, there are some concerns in the \$87 billion reconstruction package, 20 billion or so is actually for reconstruction efforts. There are some specific concerns that some of the items are not that needed, that some of them are luxurious items, items such as Wi-Fi internet access and area codes and zip codes.

How do you respond to those concerns, sir? Thank you.

**SECRETARY POWELL:** I don't consider those to be luxury items. I think everything that is in the supplemental is justified by the Coalition Provisional Authority, and I hope that Congress will study them very, very carefully. When you talk about zip codes, zip codes was part of a larger program to put in place telephone systems, to allow the country to connect itself again electronically, and to be able to communicate from one part of the country to another. This is not a luxury. This is an essential part of reconstructing a society that has been devastated for the past 30 years.

And so I hope the Congress will study this \$20 billion package very carefully, and make sure they fully understand every item in that package. And as you know, the Administration has had witnesses up there for the past week assisting, and Secretary Rumsfeld was up this afternoon, Secretary Armitage was up this morning, and I'm confident that it is a sound package worthy of the Congress's support.

In the back.

**QUESTION:** Mr. Secretary, did you discuss with President Uribe -- did you discuss with President Uribe his statement linking some human rights defenders with some terrorist groups?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** We did talk about this, and I think his presentation to the United Nations this morning put that in stark contrast. I am convinced that he is committed to the highest standards of human rights, and that's what he said in his speech, and it's the way I have seen him operate in the time that we have worked together.

Mr. President, you might wish to say a word about this.

**PRESIDENT URIBE:** Of course, we need to overcome terrorism transparently. We want one day in which we can look at the eyes of the citizens of the world and say to them, "We have overcome terrorism transparently with the observance of human rights." And Colombia is open to house every NGO. However, there are reports with -- which are, for instance, the report released by Human Rights Watch on child soldiers. I agree with the report. And we have to do our best in order to solve this problem.

There are other reports of other NGOs. We disagree with the reports and we have to express our disagreement publicly. We want closed terrorist space in Colombia, but we will reserve our right to express openly our disagreement.

**SECRETARY POWELL:** Thank you very much. I'm afraid the President has a tight schedule. Thank you. Thank you so much.

**PRESIDENT URIBE:** Secretary Powell, thank you very much.

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