



## Remarks With Colombian President Alvaro Uribe After Their Meeting

**Secretary Colin L. Powell**  
 C Street Entrance  
 Washington, DC  
 March 23, 2004

(5:43 p.m. EST)



**SECRETARY POWELL:** Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. President Uribe and I have just had a very excellent conversation, and we were joined, of course, by the Foreign Minister, my dear friend, and the Minister of Defense, who is also here. Come on over, Mr. Minister. (Laughter.) And in our conversation, of course, we reviewed the great progress that Colombia has been making.

And the President gave me a wonderful chart that describes a 21 percent decrease in the coca crop, a 48 percent decrease in incidents of terrorism, so many lives saved as a result of the decrease in the homicide rate. Same thing with kidnapping. Growth of soldiers and police, funded with Colombia's revenues as well as the assistance we have provided, as well as very excellent GDP growth with 1.2 million jobs created in 2003.

So I congratulate the President and his Cabinet for the terrific work they have been doing. And I'm pleased that the United States has been able to support this effort with Plan Colombia, with the Andean Regional Initiative, and the other support that we have provided to President Uribe since he took office.

He had good meetings, of course, also with President Bush and other members of the Administration over the last day or two of his visit. In our conversation today, we also took note, very happily, of the meeting he had earlier today with Mr. Zoellick, our Trade Representative, and the announcement of the beginning of Free Trade Area negotiations in the middle of May. And I just also advised the President that with respect to the International Coffee Organization, the United States has begun consideration of rejoining the organization. We've just begun to look at this, but we wanted to review the bidding again and see how we could be helpful in this particular market.

So Mr. President, it's always a pleasure to have you here and I would invite you to say a word or two.

**PRESIDENT URIBE:** Gracias, Mr. Secretary. (In Spanish.)

Thank you very much, Secretary Powell.

**SECRETARY POWELL:** Thank you very much.

**PRESIDENT URIBE:** This meeting has been, as always, very constructive. And thank you for all your help.

**SECRETARY POWELL:** Thank you very much, Mr. President. Want to take a question or two?

The President's in a hurry, but let me just make one announcement for the press. Just received word that Assistant Secretary Bill Burns has had good discussions in Libya. He is the first U.S. diplomat to visit with Colonel Qadhafi since early '80s, and productive meetings. And it shows that we are moving ahead with the political roadmap that we laid out with the Libyans as a result of their determination to give up their weapons of mass destruction. And we'll be issuing a statement later this afternoon that describes in greater detail Assistant Secretary Burns' visit.

Forgive us, we have to run now. The President's in a hurry.

(Secretary Powell escorts President Uribe to his car.)

**QUESTION:** Mr. Secretary, can you take a question on your trip to Spain? Tomorrow during your trip, will you offer to seek a new UN resolution to help Spain with its decision about keeping troops in Iraq?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** This is a memorial service, and I will have the opportunity to see, I hope, Prime Minister Aznar and the Prime Minister-designate, and I hope to have good discussions. But I don't think we'll get into that level of detail, since first and foremost, I'm going to represent President Bush and the American people at a memorial service. And we'll see what opportunities are there for conversation. But I doubt it would get into that specific level of detail.

**QUESTION:** There's a report -- the Basque group -- I didn't expect to be asking you this, but I thought I saw a report today that the Basque group is dissolving or at least going partly out of business.

**SECRETARY POWELL:** I saw a report like that yesterday, but I would let the Spaniards speak to that.

**QUESTION:** I wondered it was good news.

**QUESTION:** Mr. Secretary, there are reports that there are Israeli gunships firing off Gaza and also mortar attacks into Israel from Lebanon. How concerned do you remain about the consequences of the Sheikh Yassin killing, and also that if those attacks will come to the United States as well?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** We are concerned. As the President said earlier today, we're disturbed by these developments and we hope that all parties will recognize the consequences of their actions. Hamas is a terrorist organization; Israel has a right to defend itself. But in that defense, it has to consider the consequences for the peace process and how we move further.

I've heard the reports you have about some actions taking place, but I don't have any details with respect to the exact nature of those actions or any casualties that have been produced as a result.

Thank you.

Released on March 23, 2004



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