



Remarks with Colombian Foreign Minister Carolina Barco

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Casa de Narino
Bogota, Colombia
April 27, 2005

FOREIGN MINISTER BARCO: (In Spanish) Very good evening to you. It is a great pleasure. It is truly a pleasure to welcome the Secretary of the United States of State, Dr. Condoleezza Rice. She honors us with her presence. We are extremely grateful to her for making this her first visit to Latin America to come to Colombia to continue to discuss and work on the issues that are of interest to us, issues that are critical to this strategic relationship, and they are also critical for both Colombia as well as the United States.



We held a very productive meeting wherein President Uribe and the Secretary of State had an opportunity to go over a multiple set of issues, issues that join us. And also we discussed our joint efforts. Firstly, as far as combating drugs, where we have had support through Plan Colombia for the last five years, we have achieved important results. There has been an almost 50 percent reduction in the production of drugs, however we need to continue to combat this problem until there are no longer drugs in our country. We also spoke about moving forward with the U.S. support and to look at the strategies that we're using to strengthen our eradication activities, aerial, also to focus on manual eradication to be more effective in our struggle and to look at the results that both of our countries expect.

Moreover, we talked about the security situation. We talked about the important source of support that we have received in order to reduce the homicide rates, kidnappings, massacres and other violent acts. On these issues the U.S. support has been critical and we need to persevere.

We should also highlight other aspects, such as the importance of how we can move forward with the negotiations for our laws on peace and justice so that we can achieve a law that is universal in scope, that sets very clear, specific parameters for justice and for peace. As the President stated, we cannot have impunity; we must have punishment for the atrocities committed, we must also have reparations for victims, but however this peace must not be undertaken at the cost of submission. We need to take into account however that this is a peace process. This should be then a democratic, deep discussion with very clear commitments.

Moreover, we requested support in the reintegration process, in the process to reintegrate both members of the paramilitaries as well as the guerilla movements. These are significant figures. As you know, we are talking about a demobilization of about 12,000 and about 50 percent of them are from the guerilla, another 50 percent from the paramilitary groups. These are men who need to be reintegrated into society, who need psychosocial support, who also need support as far as training skills as well as jobs for them.

Secretary Condoleezza Rice was telling us about an interview that she read. This had to do with a former combatant in Afghanistan who was asked what he knew how to do. He said he did not know how to read. He was asked if he knew anything to do anything. He said no. He said he had been fighting since he had been nine years old.

Here we feel that we have a group that has at least a partial education. They might need to upgrade their education. We need to teach them how to live in society once again and we need to provide them with support, and that is why it is important to have resources and to have a strong program here in Colombia so that we can respond for these people who are reintegrated and who are seeking to become a part of a democratic society and to live once again in their communities.

The Secretary offered to relay this request of ours in the United States, also before the European Union. This is a request that has been made to the European Union by the President and we are asking for the support and greater resources.

Obviously, the President reiterated that we work on a daily basis to improve human rights. The latest figures provided by the Prosecutor's Office have shown that complaints for human rights violations have come down significantly. It is part of our commitment within the armed forces to respect human rights. We have training programs within the armed forces that we work through with the Red Cross and other organizations. But we know that there are difficulties there. We want to see recognition for our commitment to move forward in seeking to improve human rights in our country.

And lastly, and also related to our national issues, we spoke about the free trade agreement and how important this is in its connection to combating drugs for Colombia. There are links between some illicit products and agriculture. It's important therefore to strengthen that area so that we can get results that can endure in the short, medium and long term. The Secretary explained to us the difficulties that there are really in both countries and so we need to work with our respective congresses for the approval of the treaty. But the President simply wanted to reiterate the importance of the free trade agreement as far as creating jobs and for combating drugs, a war which we are totally committed to, obviously.

And we also spoke of the region. The President proposed that instead of speaking of a region, in fact, last night on the congress he talked about a leftist democracy or a right-wing democracy, and the President said that instead of talking about that, what we need is a social democracy. And he spoke of the importance to move forward with social cohesion programs. He spoke about the importance to look for a consensus in the region that revolves around the issues that have to do with social democracy.

With these notes, then I think that serves as a quick summary of some of the key issues that were discussed this afternoon. And I want to thank Secretary Rice once again for her presence here, for her commitment and for all of the support that we have received from her, from her President, from her government, from her Congress, from her people. Once again, thank you very much on behalf of the President, of the government and of myself.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you very much. I've just had a very productive meeting with President Uribe. It was a meeting in which we could discuss the impressive progress that the Government of Colombia has made in improving security, in strengthening democracy, and indeed its commitment to protecting human rights. Fulfilling key pledges to his people, President Uribe has reestablished the government's presence in all the municipalities of Colombia. That is a remarkable achievement. And in many rural towns the *casas de justicia* has replaced the arbitrary rule of guerilla and paramilitary

groups.

Another significant achievement has been the decrease in the number of Colombians displaced by conflict and violence. These concrete improvements in security and rule of law are fostering a culture of lawfulness in Colombia and a sense of security for its citizens.

We discussed the President's efforts to bring a definitive end to armed conflict and I applaud the efforts to press ahead in negotiations with the paramilitaries and the government's attempts to initiate such talks with the National Liberation Army.

Approximately 5,000 paramilitaries have already been demobilized and that's the impressive result of tough policies. And we are aware that the Colombian congress and the executive branch are discussing a law that will govern future demobilizations. We hope that good faith negotiations will soon produce a law that will effectively dismantle illegal armed groups, bring justice and reparation to victims, and punish those guilty of major crimes and atrocities. In addition, we discussed our shared obligation to defend human rights and ensure accountability.

We are really gratified that we have had an opportunity to contribute to President Uribe's very successful programs and we are committed to continuing our support for Colombia, a trusted friend and ally. In 2005 we will provide more than \$600 million to combat terrorism and drug trafficking, to improve the security of Colombian citizens and to promote democracy and human rights. Our meeting today reaffirmed the strength of these values and of the U.S.-Colombian partnership.

We also agreed to explore options to enhance our defense cooperation and to consolidate the gains that we have made against security threats.

As a result of President Uribe's policies, the Colombian economy is also growing stronger every day and we are in free trade agreement negotiations that are well advanced. We believe that a future agreement would substantially strengthen U.S.-Colombian economic ties to our mutual benefit. Free trade and the jobs it creates for Colombians and Americans will lead to broadened economic opportunities for both nations and even more effective partnerships against drugs and against terrorism.

We did have a chance to discuss the region, discuss the challenges that this region faces but the many opportunities that it also faces. I think we had a very interesting discussion of the need to describe the kind of hemisphere that we want to see. And it is a hemisphere that is trading freely, with economic development and growth, but that is based first and foremost on democratic principles, where those who are democratically elected also govern democratically, where there is a commitment to transparency, to accountability, to the strengthening of democratic institutions and to fight corruption.

On the basis of that kind of good governance, it is possible then to begin to deliver the benefits of democracy for all people. It is extremely important, as was noted in the Monterrey consensus several -- a couple years ago, that democracy and growth really start to benefit people in terms of their lives. And it means that governments have to be committed to their economic well-being, to their education, to their health care, and that is the kind of social cohesion to which the Foreign Minister was referring. And I assured President Uribe that democratically elected governments in this hemisphere who are committed to that goal, no matter where they come from across the political spectrum, will have a friend and partner in the United States.

Thank you very much.

QUESTION: (in Spanish) Carlos Cinquentas (ph) from Caracol (ph) Radio. Good evening, Madam Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Madame Foreign Minister. A couple questions.

First, one of the most concerning issues for the region has to do with the weapons issue from Venezuela. How does the U.S. view that and is the U.S. willing to help Colombia in its relationship with our neighboring country?

For the Foreign Minister, what do you expect from the United States given that issue? Another issue has to do with the FTA with the United States. The negotiations are moving forward with the U.S. in these, however they are now delayed somewhat. Added to that is the new change in Ecuador. That could cause an even further delay to this FTA. Taking that into account, do you feel that it is likely that an agreement will be signed this year, that given that the fiscal year in your country ends in October?

And for the Foreign Minister Barco, the situation with Venezuela as far as weapons is still critical. Yesterday, the Minister of Defense at the Congress -- Minister Uribe said that weapons purchased from Venezuela causes a military imbalance in the region and that there is no clear justification at this point for an acquisition of those types of weapons. President Chavez has asked the Colombian government if that is the Colombians' position or if that is the minister's own opinion. What is the Colombian government's opinion about that?

FOREIGN MINISTER BARCO: (in Spanish) Very well. As far as the issue of Venezuela's weapons purchase, we had an opportunity yesterday to review it in depth in the Congress. And what we have clearly noticed -- noted is that this is the -- that country's sovereign decision. It is to purchase weapons for its legitimate defense, for its internal needs. President Chavez has stated that he needs these weapons in order to replace his existing stock of weapons, and he needs these weapons in order to provide a more stable situation along the border that we share, and also to combat drugs.

We feel that it is very important to continue to advance in Venezuela in terms of cooperating and in combating drugs and also to addressing the conflicts around these violent groups. In that sense, we feel that what's critical here is to continue with our cooperation, to continue with our commitment and with our joint work.

We also spoke about the importance throughout the region of having controls placed on these weapons to make sure they are put to good use. We have had on this hemisphere experiences with weapons that have gone into Central America, weapons that have remained after conflict that took place between Ecuador and Peru. And we therefore see that it is important to be aware of where these weapons end up so that they do not end up in the wrong hands and create more violence.

SECRETARY RICE: On the issue of the weapons sales, we have made clear that we also have concerns that stability be maintained in this region. And, of course, the problem with small arms is that small arms can end up in the hands in which they were not intended to end up in.

So, we support the notion that there should be efforts to look at end user kinds of issues, whenever one is talking about small arms. And this is something that perhaps we can explore.

On the broader issue with Venezuela, the United States has had traditionally very good relations with Venezuela and we certainly have had good relations with the Venezuelan people. We don't have a problem with the Venezuelan people. In fact, the United States -- and this is not a bilateral issue

from our point of view, the United States and Venezuela. This is a question of what kind of hemisphere do we want to see, what kind of hemisphere do we want to live in, and what states are going to contribute to that hemisphere and what states will not contribute to that kind of hemisphere. It's a hemisphere in which we want to see free trade and economic growth. It's a hemisphere in which we want to see respect for democratic institutions, for a free press, for opposition, for nongovernmental organizations, for church groups and for trade unions that are independent. It's a hemisphere in which we want to see transparency and accountability.

And these are the issues. And it's a hemisphere in which we want neighbors to be good neighbors, not to interfere in each other's affairs, not to make more difficult -- difficult already difficult security situations. That reflects a hemisphere that we have all affirmed at the Summit of the Americas. It's the hemisphere that we have affirmed in the Democratic Charter of the OAS. And states that are prepared to fully live up to those obligations will find friends in the United States. It will be of no surprise to people here that we've had concerns about the government of Venezuela in regards to these issues. But it is against a set of standards about a hemisphere that we want to see develop in a particular way.

But we are really determined to have a positive agenda for this region, and that positive agenda has been sketched out in many meetings that we've had, in many documents that we've had that say that the key is to have more democracy, not less. The key is to have economic growth based on free trade and open economies. And the key is to take that growth and to harness its benefit for the people of these societies so that their impatience with democracy does not grow. And I think if we can concentrate on that agenda and make progress, then the states will remain committed to it and I believe that there is in fact a consensus within this hemisphere that that's what we're trying to do.

MR. BOUCHER: Okay, we have one question from Reuters.

QUESTION: Madam Secretary, once again you --

SECRETARY RICE: No, I don't need the translation.

QUESTION: Maybe my accent needs translating. (Laughter.)

Madam Secretary, once again talking about Venezuela, you've stressed some of the positive and noted concerns. But you've avoided the strong criticisms that you had used in the past. You've called Venezuela a destabilizing force, a negative force.

Allow me to ask the question in a provocative way. Is the Bush administration ducking a fight with Chavez? He can be provoked, he responds. And you on this tour are being, let's say, passive -- sorry, just to finish -- does this mean that because he's an oil supplier that the Bush administration doesn't want to provoke him because of the high oil prices that are affecting President Bush's popularity?

SECRETARY RICE: The question of oil has nothing to do with it. The question of oil with Venezuela is a longstanding economic relationship that benefits not just the United States but Venezuela. And so we are quite certain that that economic relationship is going to continue.

The issue here is that we have a positive agenda for this hemisphere. And that agenda is the one that I have just outlined. And I have come to talk with states that share that positive agenda, Brazil, Colombia. We will be in Chile with 100 democracies. In El Salvador. These are states that share the vision of where we're going.

Now, anybody who shares that vision of where we're going and is prepared to contribute to it will find a friend in the United States. It is well known that we have concerns about the Venezuelan government's activities in this region that can be destabilizing, and the Venezuelan government's activities at home which call into question its commitment to democracy.

But this is not a trip about Venezuela. This is a trip about the future of this hemisphere. And we are determined to talk about the future of this hemisphere, about trade, about growth, about responsibility to people, to bring the people at the margins into the economic mainstream. We are determined to talk about the progress that countries like Colombia have made on the basis of democracy.

The issues with Venezuela will remain issues. But the fact of the matter is, this is not a question of the United States and Venezuela; this is a question of what kind of hemisphere we're going to see and what states are going to contribute to it and which ones are not.

QUESTION: (in Spanish) Madam Secretary, the issue of extradition, there are some leaders of the paramilitary groups who are against extradition. The government has suspended extradition for some of them based on the peace process. Do you respect that decision and how will you make it so that people who are drug traffickers only sneak in -- to keep them from sneaking into the peace process? That is a concern of Colombia.

Also, there were three Americans who were kidnapped by the FARC three years ago. What is your government's official policy given that case? Is there work being done with the Colombian government to allow for a military solution to recover those hostages? Are there consultations about that?

And for Foreign Minister Barco, there was a recent case of some American citizens who took part in drug trafficking. I believe it's linked to Plan Colombia. What is the Colombian government's concern as far as that? Was there an agreement reached on that? Thank you.

FOREIGN MINISTER BARCO: (in Spanish) If you allow me, I want to begin, because I think that the question that you're asking the Secretary has to do with the definition of a very clear policy on behalf of our government. The government is not willing to let drug traffickers take part in the peace process. As you know, we took a very clear census or accounting of the paramilitaries who have submitted themselves to the peace process, thereby establishing how long they have been members of the self defense or paramilitary forces, clearly establishing also those who were not paramilitary members. And that's why we already have some cases of drug traffickers who have had to leave that area because they cannot be part of the process, and the government is very alert to that and very aware, in order to avoid that situation and to have the greatest amount of control.

So I'm sorry to interrupt, but I do want to make that very clear, that the government is taking the strictest measures to keep that situation from taking place. And we have, in fact, already solved several cases of drug traffickers who were submitting themselves to the peace process who were not, in fact, paramilitaries and who could not be part of the process.

SECRETARY RICE: We obviously have an interest in extradition, and it is alongside the importance of peace and justice and alongside the continuing demobilization. It's one of the most important elements that we are encouraging.

Obviously, this is a Colombian process of coming to law, a Colombian process that is the peace process. But I think the Colombian government well

understands our concerns that the possibility of extradition remain. This has been very key for the United States.

On the matter of the people who were kidnapped by the FARC, I mentioned this today when I was at our embassy because it is very important to the United States that it be remembered, that the FARC did this and that we are still actively seeking to get those people back home. This is a high priority for the United States and is something we are deeply concerned about and the government of Colombia is deeply concerned about and we cooperate on it and we very much look forward to the day when they return.

MR. BOUCHER: Last question from *New York Times*.

QUESTION: Madam Secretary, Plan Colombia is five years old and the United States has spent \$3 billion over that time. More than a million acres of coke have been eradicated, 50,000 acres of opium. And yet the presence of these drugs in the United States has not diminished at all. In fact, the latest government figures show that they have actually increased in amount. Are you disturbed by this? Is it time to rethink the strategy here?

SECRETARY RICE: I don't think that it is time to abandon a strategy that is both diminishing the crop here and a strategy that is restoring democratic security to Colombia. The most important thing here is that you have a country which really frankly did not control large parts of its territory, where there has been a decision by this government to reestablish that control; where now, in places where the police could not go, they can; where there is a justice system that is being developed that can deal with drug traffickers; where we have had more drug traffickers taken down by this government than at any other time in its predecessor's history; where we have had important extraditions of people.

This is a policy that is working. Now, it took a long time to get this problem started and it's going to take a while to eliminate the problem. But you don't start midstream in something that has been very effective.

I would just note too that from the point of view of the United States and from the point of view of the President there is, of course, a supply problem. And we work on the supply problem through interdiction, through eradication, through work with partners like Colombia. But there also obviously is a demand problem for the United States. The President has always said that we have to work on the demand side of our problem as well.

Plan Colombia is coming to an end, but our commitment to Colombia is not coming to end. The formal Plan Colombia, that five-year plan, is coming to an end but our commitment to Colombia is not coming to an end, because we believe that the combination of military and police and justice assistance and economic assistance that we have been giving to Colombia has made it a place that is on a road to greater security, on a road to dealing with the drug trafficking problem, and on the road to dealing with narco-terrorism in effective ways.

But it's going to be a long road. It's hard. But we've had -- the Colombians have had real success here.

2005/T6-11

Released on April 27, 2005

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