



## Remarks at Private Sector and Opinion Leaders Reception

### Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Medellin, Colombia  
January 24, 2008

**SECRETARY RICE:** Thank you very much and thank you for hosting this wonderful gathering. Thank you. Minister, my colleague, Fernando, thank you for being here; Ambassador, the Governor and the Mayor and other distinguished guests.

And to my traveling partners here, the members of Congress of the United States, I'm really delighted to be here in Medellin and I think it's absolutely true that I would not have been here in Medellin just a few years ago. And that shows what extraordinary progress there has been in Colombia.

Indeed, the story of Colombia is one that is inspirational, inspirational in the region and inspirational in the world, because there are so many places in the world that are trying to overcome civil conflict, so many places in the world that are trying to overcome difficult circumstances, so many places in the world that are fighting against violent people who wish to deny to ordinary citizens and peaceful people a better future.

And when you look at how far Colombia has come since the bad days of just a few years ago, it is indeed inspiring because it says that people can, with the right leadership -- and here I have to congratulate the excellent leadership that you have elected in your democracy over time, but especially the leadership of President Uribe. When societies come together and decide that they are no longer going to live in fear and violence, and they put the resources behind the power of the state to act for good in protecting its citizens, and when societies come together -- the people in this room, business leaders, professionals, civil society and yes, even some who may oppose this particular free trade agreement -- even they as members of your democracy deserve credit for how far Colombia has come.

Now, I know that there is much more to do and I am a strong believer that the partnership with the United States is extremely important in Colombia's continuing to overcome its difficulties and to paint a brighter future for, for instance, these wonderful children that are going to perform for us. The United States has been a good partner. That partnership goes back to the -- throughout history, but really back to the late '90s. And it's been a bipartisan partnership. It's been a partnership that the Clinton Administration really began to facilitate and to push forward through Plan Colombia. It has been a partnership that has been sustained and pushed forward even further with the Bush Administration. But it is indeed a bipartisan partnership that the United States can be justly proud of.

But now that partnership is reaching a new phase and a new level, and the FTA is the most concrete manifestation of the new level of our partnership. Having achieved what we have together -- and it is extraordinary to see the lower levels of violence. It is extraordinary to see the Colombian state in charge of its territory. It is extraordinary to see that Colombians citizens can now travel along roads that they would not dare to have gone to -- along just a few years ago.

And it is extraordinary to see that the justice system is indeed starting to punish those who have engaged in violence against their fellow citizens. It is trying to return people who may have been a part of organizations of violence, but perhaps themselves are still able to be rehabilitated, trying to return those people to societies. That is important to society. That's important to overcoming and healing the wounds of any society coming out of civil conflict.

And we want the United States to continue to be that strong partner. And that's why I'm here to talk about the FTA, to hear those who have concerns, but to say very strongly that whatever the challenges facing Colombia, they are not going to be easier if this FTA does not pass. In fact, they will be harder.

And so, I know that Colombia still has work to do. And the Bush Administration's support for the FTA is not because we believe that the Colombian story is perfect or complete, but because we believe that in the context of the growth and economic activity that the free trade agreement will produce, Colombia will be better able to meet its problems and meet its challenges and forge a future ahead.

And it is an important message not just for Colombia but for this whole region. When President Bush was in the region just recently, he said something very important. He said the United States is not asking that there be loyalty to our partnership and our friendship based on some ideological test. We have good friends from the right of the political spectrum and good friends from the left of the political spectrum. It is not an ideological test. It is a question of whether you govern democratically and justly, of whether you try and provide economic prosperity to your people through open markets and free trade, and whether you are committed to social justice.

We understand that a free trade agreement is no guarantee of social justice, but we do believe that with economic growth and economic activity, the Colombian Government, state and the Colombian democracy will have greater resources to make certain that social justice can be pursued.

That's the message that I have come to deliver, that you have a friend and a partner in the United States and President Bush, but also, if you look at my delegation, from across the aisle. We want Colombia to succeed. Colombia is an inspirational story. And with our partnership and our continued partnership and with this free trade agreement, we can continue to make Colombia an inspirational story in the future.

Thank you very much for the warm reception. (Applause.)

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