

Remarks at a Land Titling Event in Cartagena April 15, 2012

Buenas tardes! It is a great honor to be here with President Santos, the First Lady, so many distinguished guests. I am especially thankful to all the children because they are sitting very still and well behaved, and I want to get lessons for my own children from the parents and teachers, because they're doing a great job here.

And I'm thrilled that—I'm thrilled we're joined by another champion of these communities, especially the education development of these beautiful children. So thank you, Shakira, for the wonderful work that you do.

This is a historic day, decades, even centuries in the making. For generations, many of you have lived on these lands, toiled these lands, raised your families on these lands. And now, from this day forward, you will at long last hold title to this land: La Boquilla and Basilio de Palenque.

And being here holds special meaning for me. Early in my Presidency, my family and I visited Ghana in West Africa. And we visited the historic Cape Coast Castle, and I'll never forget my two young daughters—the descendants of Africans and African Americans—looking out through the door of no return where so many Africans began their forced journey to this hemisphere.

Today we gather in a port city where so many of those Africans arrived in chains. Like their brothers and sisters in both our countries and across this hemisphere, they endured unimaginable cruelty. But in their suffering, which revealed man's capacity for evil, we also see the spirit of this day, man's capacity for good, for perseverance, for healing; the belief that we can overcome.

President Santos and I just took a tour of this magnificent cathedral dedicated to a man of faith who devoted his life to the least among us: San Pedro Claver—in the United States, Peter Claver. And in the United States, it was another man of faith, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, who said that the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice. And that's what's happening today.

Throughout my visit here in Colombia, I've spoken about the remarkable transformation that's underway in this country: more security, more prosperity, more hope. And this is a tribute to the perseverance of leaders like President Santos and you, the Colombian people. But we all understand that peace is not simply the absence of war. True and lasting peace has to be based on justice and dignity for every person.

And that's why today is so important. Giving you and so many Afro-Colombian communities title to this land is part of ending this nation's long conflict. It gives you a new stake in a new Colombia. Not far from here, your ancestors were bought and sold. Going forward, Colombia can realize its full potential by empowering all of its people, no matter what you look like or where you come from.

Both our nations have struggled to overcome a painful past. Both keep striving to fulfill our ideals of justice and equality. And I stand here today as President of the United States and you can stand here with title to the land, and that is proof that progress is possible.

And so when we look out to these children behind us, these beautiful children, they have a brighter future ahead of them. But that future will only be fulfilled if we're making investments in them every single day, as Shakira and the First Lady are working to do, as President Santos and I have to commit ourselves to do. But today is an important first step in creating that brighter future for them. And as you seek peace and prosperity and the dignity that all people deserve, I promise you, you will always have a strong and steady partner in the United States of America.

Muchas gracias.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:09 p.m. in the Plaza San Pedro. In his remarks, he referred to Maria Clemencia Rodriguez de Santos, wife of President Juan Manuel Santos Calderon of Colombia; and musician Shakira Isabel Mebarak Ripoll. Audio was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.