

ahead. And my message to the people of your country is, we want to help every individual realize their God-given potential.

I'd like to propose a toast to the people of this country, to the leadership of this country. May God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3 p.m. at Casa de Narino. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of President Uribe. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

The President's News Conference With President Alvaro Uribe Velez of Colombia in Bogota

March 11, 2007

President Uribe. Mr. President of the United States of America, George W. Bush; distinguished members of the delegation; friends from the Government; distinguished journalists who have come from other countries and from Colombia: I would like to welcome again in the warmest fashion possible. I would like to welcome his delegation as well.

During the working lunch we have just had, at the end, I was able to read some beautiful paragraphs from Bolivar, the Liberator: one in the Charter of Angostura, where he actually was talking about the creation of the American Nation around—or on the basis of freedom, tolerance, and of having a general law that would respond to common interest through individual wills. The Liberator also mentioned a very nice paragraph during the Constitution Assembly in Bolivia on the legacy of President George Washington.

I was saying that the relations between the Colombian people and the American people are sound. We have mutual understanding on democratic values since the birth of our two states. This visit is a reason for being proud. We will trust even more our relations and the Colombian process, and we would like to thank you very warmly, President Bush.

You have come to Colombia at a time of unrest because of the peace process that is

taking place. You have come at a time of revelations that really have motivated a public debate. But they are taking place because of one reason, and that reason is that our policy on democratic security has tried to defeat terrorism in the guerrillas, in the paramilitaries, because our democratic security policy wants to reestablish democratic institutions fully in Colombia. And these revelations are taking place because our law on justice and peace requires and demands truth—truth so that the country will know the dimension of the tragedy we have gone through, truth to prepare us for a future free of the guerrillas, the paramilitaries, and the drug traffickers.

The law on justice and peace that is being enforced has been discussed in Congress throughout its approval process, and it has been discussed during its implementation, and has three elements that makes it different from former legislation in Colombia and in the world.

Number one, justice. There will be no amnesty for crimes against humanity. This law requires reparations to take place, and there is no other single country in the world other than Colombia that might say that in order to have shorter sentences within a law of peace, the perpetrators are required to hand in their assets, so as to repair the victims. And that has never happened anywhere else in the world.

There are two countries in Latin America that tried to compensate for the problems of the victims under dictatorships but with money coming from the budget. Here we will strive to give them all the assets that the perpetrators have. It is truth, justice, and reparations, and these are the three key elements of our legislation.

This country has an independent justice system, Mr. President, which makes our democracy different. The decision of my administration in this process of institutional recovery is total support for justice so that Colombia may finally overcome the time of terrorism.

I would like to go back in history. For 30 years, the Marxist guerrillas actually hit Colombia, and they proposed a social revolution, and they produced even more poverty. They proposed more democracy, and they were assassinating and murdering the mayors

and the council members, and they were actually killing democracy.

These guerillas ended up being financed by drug traffickers. And there are many people in many regions of Colombia that were not protected by the state, and now they feel protected, thanks to our security policy. The growth of the guerillas and the lack of a state protection for citizens resulted in these guerillas producing the paramilitarism, and these paramilitary phenomenon started committing the same crimes, atrocious crimes, as the guerillas. The Marxist guerillas brought to Colombia the validity of combining all sorts of struggle. They infiltrated universities, the labor movement, and the peasant movement. They infiltrated very important sectors of intellectual movements and journalists. And they infiltrated politics.

The same guerillas planted a hatred amongst the classes. They wanted to eliminate the foundation of solidarity on which this nation was built. The guerillas taught the paramilitaries to combine all sorts of struggle. And what happened then? Some of these guerillas actually signed an amnesty, but they were not required to tell the truth, which is something we are requiring now. So they didn't say which were the sectors of the civil society that had been infiltrated. These guerillas were not demanded to give reparations to the victims, as we are asking for now. And these guerillas were able, in spite of having committed so many atrocious crimes, to get an amnesty for atrocious crimes, amnesty that is not given out today for these crimes against humanity.

The peace process that we are undertaking with the—[*inaudible*—]of truth, justice, and reparations, actually set the limits for peace processes in the future. We have been very rigorous in this process. It has been a very serious process, and the world and Colombia will know that the processes in Colombia in the future, with the guerillas, such as the ELN and FARC, should require, as we are requiring today, truth, justice, and reparations.

I would like you to know, Mr. President, that our commitment is the full defeat of terrorism and the total recovery of justice and of democratic institutions. We are working with a model of state. We are not dismantling

the state, as has been done in many Latin American countries throughout the nineties, nor are we proposing a state-dominated government. We do not accept the dismantling of the state or state monopolies. What we are building is trust for private investment in Colombia, and at the same time, we are demanding social responsibilities. We see in trust a way of investing in our country. In investment, we see a development tool, and in growth, we see a possibility of overcoming poverty and building equity.

You have come to Colombia, Mr. President, with a thesis which is necessary for our continent, and that is a diversification of the energy basket. After Brazil, Colombia is the second country in the continent in the production of biofuels. We have created the tax incentives. We have approved regulations in agreement with the standards of the World Trade Organization. There are projects that are producing more than 1,000 liters of ethanol in Colombia, and there are many more that are being installed. We have 6 million hectares in the Orinoco department, and these are savannas, in general, that we can use for biofuel production without destroying a single tree in our jungle.

We have thanked the President of the United States of America and his delegation for the support given to Colombia through the Plan Colombia. The fight against drug trafficking has received support, practical support, and your support, the support of President Clinton, the support of your Congress, Your enthusiastic support, Mr. President, have been very practical and have helped the struggle of the Colombian people against drug trafficking.

We have the opportunity of discussing very important issues as well, such as the agenda against poverty, our social goals, our program of forest rangers families, which is unique in the world, that is paying 50,000 peasant families so that they can protect the jungle, free of drugs and so that they can recover the jungle where it has been destroyed.

We have discussed our trade agreement again and political possibility of integration, and far away from ideological sectorisms that is trying to look for opportunities of investment and employment with dignity and social security programs.

Thank you very much, Mr. President, for coming to Colombia. I am very proud of my fellow countrymen—when you could come here after landing at the airport, going through this beautiful landscape, and was able to go to Plaza de Bolivar and to this palace. I am very proud, Mr. President, that the world may see how the Colombian people is overcoming nowadays the great difficulties that we have suffered in the last years.

And again, thank you so much for your visit, sir.

President Bush. Thank you very much for your kind words and for your invitation. Laura and I are thrilled to be back in your country again. I've been really looking forward to coming to this beautiful capital city, and I thank the people of Colombia for such a generous welcome.

We did have an extensive conversation, but that's what you'd expect when friends sit down at a table together. I bring the greetings of the United States. The people of this—my country care deeply about the human condition. We believe strongly in human rights and human values, just like you believe in them. We're two strong democracies, and we've got a lot in common and a lot of values that we share. So this visit advances those values.

I listened very carefully to the President when he was—expressed concern about the immigration laws of the United States. He was most eloquent in his concern about Colombians who live in the United States, and I assured him that a top priority of my administration is the passage of comprehensive immigration reform. I will work with both Republicans and Democrats to get a comprehensive bill to my desk as quickly as possible, Mr. President.

We talked about the benefits of expanding trade so that people in both our countries can benefit. The United States is Colombia's largest trading partner. Colombia is the second-largest market in Latin America for U.S. farmers. Trade is beneficial to both countries, and it can grow even more with the free trade agreement that we signed in November.

I told the President that I will work hard for the passage of that important piece of

legislation. I believe that a trade package with Colombia is in the interests of both our Nations, Mr. President.

I'm looking forward to visiting with some Afro-Colombians today to talk about social justice programs. The reason I do is because it's very important for the people of South America and Central America to know that the United States cares deeply about the human condition and that much of our aid is aimed at helping people realize their God-given potential. And so we'll talk about programs all aimed at giving people a chance to realize their dreams, Mr. President.

You described many of those programs at lunch—or your cabinet described many of those programs at lunch, and I was most impressed by the strategy of your administration and the vigor and the energy of your Cabinet.

I'm looking forward very much to talking and continuing to work with you to defeat the drug lords and narcotraffickers—narcoterrorists. You recognize, like I recognize, that the most important function of state is to provide security for its people. You cannot tolerate, in a society, the ability of people to take innocent life to achieve political objectives. And so I appreciate your steadfast strength and so do the people of this country.

I am looking forward to working with you on the second phase—or the next phase of Plan Colombia. We're going to work with your government to continue to fight drug trafficking. The United States has an obligation to work to reduce the demand for drugs, and at the same time, work to interdict the supply of drugs. There's a lot we can do. But part of it is to help you exercise control over all your territory, is to strengthen the rule of law, and to expand economic opportunity for the citizens. And we want to help.

The Plan Colombia recognizes the importance of protecting human rights. I appreciate the President's determination to bring human rights violators to justice. He is strong in that determination. It's going to be very important for Members of my United States—our United States Congress to see that determination. And I believe, if given a fair chance, President Uribe can make the case.

This Colombia Government continues to make progress that is going to earn greater confidence from all its citizens and greater respect in the international community. You've set high expectations for your nation. I appreciate your determination, and I'm proud to call you a personal friend and to call your country a strategic partner of the United States. Thank you for having me.

Okay.

Colombian Government

Q. Good afternoon. President Bush, what is your opinion about the way in which the government has handled the scandal of the politicians involved in drug trafficking because—and the paramilitaries? Because we know that there are many more members involved with the paramilitaries. Up to what extent do you support President Uribe given the fact that most of these paramilitary heads are drug traffickers? And finally, the U.S. will insist on extraditing these people?

President Bush. I support a plan that says that there will be an independent judiciary analyzing every charge brought forth, and when someone is found guilty, there's punishment. That's the kind of plan I support. It happens to be the kind of plan the President supports. In other words, there's no political favorites when it comes to justice, that if someone is guilty, they will pay a penalty. And the best way to assure that that penalty is fair and the justice is fair is for there to be a court independent from politics.

And so, when I asked this very same question to the President about the news I've been reading in Washington, DC, the same questions he's going to be asked when he and his government come to talk to our Congress, he answered just like I described. He said, "We have an independent court. We've got a firm law. People will be held to account, whether or not they're—no matter what political party they may or may not be associated with." That's what the people of Colombia expect; that's the kind of justice they're going to receive.

Listen, this country has come through some very difficult times. And the best way to heal wounds is for people to see fair, independent justice being delivered, and I be-

lieve that's the kind of justice this government will do.

Deb [Deb Riechmann, Associated Press].

U.S. Troop Deployment/Democracy in Colombia

Q. —key Members of Capitol Hill are finding it disconcerting that the number of U.S. troops deployed keeps climbing. Even the budget revisions that you announced a couple of days ago ordered up more. I'm wondering, do you think that the American citizens should now look at the troop buildup that you announced in January, the 21,500, as merely a starting point? And—

President Bush. Go ahead.

Q. And President Uribe, with all the talk about Chavez, could you tell us your opinion on whether you think his influence in the region is overstated?

President Uribe. What is my opinion on?

Q. With all the talk about Chavez, could you tell us how much you—if you think that his influence in the region is overestimated or exaggerated?

President Bush. The troop announcement I made was over 20,000 combat troops. Secretary Gates and General Pace went up to Congress and testified to the effect that those combat troops are going to need some support. And that's what the American people are seeing in terms of Iraq, the support troops necessary to help the reinforcements do their job. My hope, of course, is that Congress provides the funding necessary for the combat troops to be able to do their job, without any strings attached.

Secondly, in terms of Afghanistan, I did announce, as a result of a review of our policy, an additional 3,200 troops. But in addition to that, the troops that you're referring to are going to be part of a training and embedding mission that I did also discuss during that strategy, although I didn't have any details of the troops.

President Uribe. Colombia is a loyal ally to the States, and it shows solidarity towards Latin America as well. We have promoted more integration with the U.S.A. through Plan Colombia and the free trade agreement and more integration with Latin America as well. The Andean community, it has been led by Colombia and has an agreement

signed with MERCOSUR. We have contributed to the creation of the South America Union. Colombia has been recently accepted as the main member of a Plan Panama Puebla.

So we are looking also for a trade agreement with Canada. We are about to close negotiations with three Central American countries. And as you can see, this is our democratic and loyal international policy. With our sister countries we have very good relations. We respect, and we ask everyone to respect, the guiding principles of international public law, as well as the respect for the autonomy in each country and the principle of nonintervention. We have to help one another in promoting freedom and in overcoming poverty and in conquering health.

I have to mention something about the question that was asked to President Bush. Number one, the whole world must know that this country was affected for 30 years by the Marxist guerillas; that these guerillas infiltrated politics and journalism; that they infiltrated the labor movement and labor unions, universities. And the truth was never demanded, which is something we have to demand in the future.

Number two, the world must know that many—during these years, some regions in Colombia were not protected. Number three, the world must know that the guerillas and the lack of protection was what generated the paramilitarism. Number four, the world must know that this administration is the first one that has started fighting directly against the paramilitarism. There is a political discussion going on, but the paramilitary aggression has gone down radically.

Why? Because the law on justice and peace has let most—has resulted in most of the paramilitary leaders being in jail because our security policy has actually eliminated more than 1,700 of these paramilitary groups' members. And I'd like to have so many people from other countries in Colombia present here to be able to say that most of the crimes that are being tried and prosecuted happened before my administration, to say that democratic security has been recovering the transparency in electoral processes in Colombia. Last year's elections, the opposition to

my administration has not even one complaint about lack of guarantees. They were able to visit all the places with which in the past were not possible to visit because, on the one hand, there was control by the guerillas, and there was also paramilitary control in other regions, and they couldn't visit these places.

Candidates running for the Presidency in 2006 received effective guarantees. They were able to visit the whole country, and the effect of the democratic security policy was quite evident because there were no pressures against them by the terrorists. The only pressure in the year 2006 were against the people who supported my campaign in departments in the southern part of the country, where FARC, together with the drug traffickers, introduced a strike, and they threatened those who were going to vote for me. And this is something that the world should be aware of. And there were candidates to Congress and the President from all ideological movements.

The world must also know that it is a government that has asked for the truth; that the government is promoting the law on justice and peace; that it is this administration that has made the decision of dismantling the criminal machinery of the paramilitaries; that it was the government who made the decision to put them in jail; that it is this government that has made the decision that they have to give out their own assets to—for the reparations of the victims; and that it is the government that has made the decision of supporting justice fully.

For the first time, the supreme court of justice in Colombia, which is an independent branch, has its own investigators. Thanks to the will of this administration of funding this group, we are dismantling what was built for many years, for more than three decades. Terrorism advanced in taking parts of Colombia, and terrorism made progress in suppressing freedoms, in threatening journalists, in assassinating labor union leaders. And of all this, we are actually making progress.

So I think I have to tell an anecdote as well. Not long ago, I was asked if the government supported direct transmissions on TV of the hearings where the paramilitaries are being tried before the prosecutors. And I said

that the government supported this transmission alive and direct because that is the way to get the truth. So instead of being afraid for telling the truth, we have been supporting truth. Instead of looking for ways out of justice, we are trying to support justice as much as possible.

Let's talk about the Director of the security agency, the DAS. When he left this agency, there were no complaints of links with paramilitaries against him. And he was then accused of facts that were known months after he left this agency, the security agency. And I have to discuss these subjects because these are subjects that are becoming increasingly important in international debates. The Minister of Defense has said that if there were any militaries related to terrorist organizations, they will be withdrawn from their positions.

But we cannot fall into the trap of the guerrillas, that we should weaken the armed forces. We are not going to make them weak, because this is the only way we have to have a country without any guerrillas and without any paramilitaries. There are members—if there are members of this Government that have any links to these organizations, will be immediately removed from their offices.

And so I am concerned for the question asked by the journalist. And he said—and this is not correct—that there are many members of the government related or with links with paramilitary groups. And this is a contradiction because this is the first government ever that has prosecuted the paramilitaries, that has actually killed some of the paramilitaries and sent others to jail. We are going to eliminate paramilitarism, and we are going to eliminate the guerrillas, because we can't fall in the trap that poses a paramilitary scandal that will actually do away with all the results in democratic security.

The Minister of Defense, at lunch, was saying that we are going to levee a tax on the wealthiest contributors in Colombia so that they can contribute to the consolidation of the democratic security program. And we will demand the truth without any fears, and this is what makes a difference.

When I was running for the Presidency, I was not well-interpreted. I was saying that

Colombia had to eliminate the guerrillas, but perhaps I was misunderstood because I also said that the only way was to recover the institutions and, hence, that we had to eliminate the paramilitaries as well.

On August the 7th, I will have been 5 years in power, and throughout all the time—and I say this before a great ally, the President of the United States, and before the world, thanks to the journalists present here—throughout this government, we have constantly fought the guerrillas, the paramilitaries, and the drug traffickers continuously. Our sole purpose is Colombia free of this plague; our sole purpose is a Colombia that will have strong institutions again. There is nothing to hide here. We are fighting against narco and terrorism. And let that be clear to you all.

FARC/American Hostages

Q. Good afternoon. This is a question for President Bush. The FARC had many people kidnaped for political purposes and for very many years. And the humanitarian agreement has been discussed, amongst others, the free citizens of your countries. Mr. Shannon said this week that the U.S. would be extremely happy if we could get a solution through a humanitarian agreement. So my question is, are you going with your administration to propose an option of a humanitarian agreement, so that these kidnapes are finally released, vis-a-vis a military action?

And number two, Mr. President, is it true that you two discussed the military actions that had to be reinforced to release the hostages? And you have not answered if you are going to insist on extraditing the paramilitary heads from Colombia.

President Bush. —President Uribe. We've had good relations; we're friends; we've worked very closely on the extraditions. And so it will be a government-to-government decision.

In terms of the hostages, I am concerned about their safety. I really am—I'm worried about their families. These are three innocent folks who have been held hostage for too long, and their families are concerned about them. We hear from their families. Their kidnapers ought to show some heart, what they ought to show. And I've obviously

discussed this with the President, and he's developing strategies that will hopefully bring them out safely. That's all I ask.

It's amazing, isn't it, to live in a society where you've got part of your country where people just kidnap somebody who is here trying to help, without any regard to whether or not—how their family feels.

So that's what I think about, sir. That's what's on my mind about those hostages. Obviously, I'd like to see them come out safely.

Matt [Matt Spetalnick, Reuters].

Iran and Syria/Iraq Regional Conference

Q. President Bush, in your assessment, what, if anything, was accomplished at the Baghdad regional conference? And what are your expectations for future rounds? Also, do you take—do you believe that Iran and Syria were serious in their post-conference statements that they want to help stabilize Iraq? And if that is true, do you see a possibility of opening the way towards more formal direct contacts with those two countries?

President Bush. I'm the kind of person that likes people to say something and then do it; then we'll react. Words are easy to say in politics, in the international diplomacy. If they really want to help stabilize Iraq, there are things for them to do, such as cutting off weapon flows and/or the flow of suicide bombers into Iraq. There's all kind of ways to measure whether they're serious about the words they uttered. We, of course, welcome those words. Those are nice statements. And now they can act on them.

I thought the conference—well, first of all, I thought the conference got people in the neighborhood to say positive things about the young democracy. In other words, people are now committed publicly to helping Iraq, which was, I thought, very positive. I think the other benefit from the conference is, is that the government gained some confidence. In other words, this young democracy had nations from around the neighborhood and around the world come and talk to them in a way that was constructive and positive.

Part of the success in Iraq is going to be whether or not this government has got the confidence necessary to make hard decisions. They're learning what democracy is all about.

They've come from a tyranny to democracy in a pretty quick period of time. And I believe the conference will give the different factions inside Iraq the confidence necessary to do the hard things to reconcile and the government the confidence necessary to make the decision so that reconciliation can happen.

So it was a positive outcome. And in terms of the expectations of the next meetings, we'll see. But the point is, is that the momentum made in the first one can be carried over to the second one. Secretary Rice will be going to that meeting. In other words, it's a step up in—I'm not dissing anybody, but it's a step up in the pay grade, let's put it that way. [Laughter] And I think—and I think Condi is going to—will take an agenda that will help advance this young democracy, and she's going to work with the other nations to do so.

Gracias, Senor Presidente.

President Uribe. *Gracias, President.*

President Bush. Thank you very much. Thank you all.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 3:34 p.m. at Casa de Narino. In his remarks, he referred to Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates. President Uribe referred to Andres Mauricio Penate Giraldo, Director, Department of Security Administration, and Minister of National Defense Juan Manuel Santos Calderon of Colombia. President Uribe also referred to ELN, the National Liberation Army, and FARC, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia. A reporter referred to President Hugo Chavez Frias of Venezuela. President Uribe spoke in Spanish, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks Prior to a Discussion on the United States Afro-Colombian Outreach Program in Bogota

March 11, 2007

Well, Mr. President, thank you very much. Laura and I, as well as Secretary of State Rice and our Ambassador, are honored that citizens from your country have come to share with us stories and concerns that will better enable our Government to help. And