

COLOMBIA



**STATEMENT BY
THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF COLOMBIA,
JUAN MANUEL SANTOS,
BEFORE THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE UNITED NATIONS
IN ITS 67TH SESSION**

New York, 26 September 2012

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Mr. President,

Two years ago, during my first statement before this Assembly as President of Colombia, I expressed my country's aspiration to become a member of the Security Council for the period 2011-2012.

We took on the responsibility of participating in the making of decisions with regard to critical situations that threaten world peace with absolute independence, and aware of the enormous commitment required to work in favor of international peace and security.

It has been a particular troublesome time in which the aspirations of many peoples -that had suffered the scourge of long conflicts and armed confrontation- were realized.

Countries like Liberia, Sierra Leone and Cote d'Ivoire are making strides towards peacebuilding and the Rule of Law.

In Libya, a relentless tyranny that had been around for more than 40 years was broken in a process where the Security Council played a decisive role.

My government did not hesitate to condemn the violent repression that the civilian population, justly clamoring for the exercise of their fundamental rights, was subjected to.

That is why we joined the Council's decisions that contributed to a transition towards democracy that -although fragile still- has the support of the international community in order to achieve its consolidation.

There are still violent groups that want to sabotage this process and use terrorist methods.

Let this be the moment to condemn in the strongest terms the despicable attack perpetrated against the United States Consulate in Benghazi.

Extremism and terrorism cannot be allowed to continue showing disregard for human life.

Today the Arab world is experiencing a transformation in its means of political organization, and is opening its way towards democracy.

This is a process that requires -in order to last- respect for the rights of the population and the generation of conditions for sustainable economic development.

We hope that progress in citizen participation -in particular women- is strengthened in order to consolidate democratic systems with opportunities for development and welfare.

With regard to the dire situation Syria has been experiencing for more than a year and half, I must express our frustration with the inability of the international community to put an end to the tragedy that every day takes more and more Syrian lives.

From this Assembly, we reiterate our call for an end to the attacks and for a political negotiation that resolves the legitimate aspirations of all sectors of Syrian society.

The application of Kofi Annan's Six Point Plan would contribute to facilitating a political transition led by Syria.

I would like to express our Support to the new Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States, Lakhdar Brahimi, and wish great success in his difficult task.

Now, if there is a country in our hemisphere that requires peacebuilding, as a comprehensive task, it is Haiti.

We continue to work for Haiti.

Its recovery requires our continuous Support in order to strengthen its institutional and productive capacities; to generate employment and reduce extreme poverty, and to get the United Nations to work for development in this country.

I invite you to persevere in this cause.

A key event for the world this year was the United Nations Summit on Sustainable Development Summit "Rio + 20".

Colombia -based on the model of the Millennium Development Goals- led the proposal to establish the Sustainable Development Goals, which was the most important result of the Rio + 20 process.

Today, the Sustainable Development Goals look to be a fundamental component of the planet's development agenda and the Secretary-General himself has identified them as one of the five priorities of his legacy.

For this reason, we celebrate that our Foreign Minister has been invited to be a member of the High Level Panel on that agenda.

This year the Sixth Summit of the Americas gathered in Colombia, with the presence of 30 Heads of State and Government from the western hemisphere.

It was a fruitful gathering that we organized, simultaneously and for the first time, along with a CEO Summit attended by the chairmen and women of the main companies from America and with a Social Forum that brought together people from diverse social organizations in the continent.

The Summit of the Americas in Cartagena was characterized by frank and open dialogue regarding the most crucial issues in the region and the world.

The governments of America agreed to take on an analysis and discussion of the balance, effectiveness and perspectives of the so-called "War on Drugs", and the possible alternatives to it.

It is our duty to determine –on objective scientific bases- if we are doing the best we can or if there are better options to combat this scourge.

In this sense, we gave the OAS a mandate to begin, within the organization, this analysis and discussion, inviting other entities, the first of which, of course, must be the United Nations.

This is only a first step, but one of great importance as it is the beginning of a discussion that the world has avoided for many years and one we hope will produce concrete results.

The debate on drugs must be frank, and without a doubt, global.

Also two years ago, in my statement before this Assembly, I expressed my conviction that the decade that was starting should be the decade of Latin America and the Caribbean, a decade that would consolidate this region of the world as a region of peace, of progress and of solutions for the rest of the planet.

Today we have the satisfaction of validating that our region, in effect, is going through a positive moment, with solid economies, functional democracies and no current conflicts among the nations that make it up.

Relatively recent regional coordination mechanisms, like Unasur and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, are evidence of the willingness to cooperate among our countries and our peoples.

I want to highlight, given its enormous potential, the Pacific Alliance that we formalized this year between Mexico, Peru, Chile and Colombia –open to the participation of other States-, through which we seek to strengthen trade, political and human ties between our countries and with the Nations of the immense Pacific Basin.

I cannot finish without referring to the special moment that our country is going through.

Amidst the international turbulence, we have managed to maintain a healthy and growing economy that has created more than 2 million jobs over the course of two years and that shows important progress in reducing poverty.

We have put in place initiatives of great social impact like the Victims Law –the only one in the world that seeks to return lands to displaced peasants and repair the victims of a conflict that is not yet finished- or like a hydrocarbon and mining Royalties Reform to distribute much more fairly the revenues from these activities, and in that way generate a more effective social development.

Nevertheless, our progress –which has been remarkable- has been restraint by an absurd conflict that has been going on for more than a half a century.

Today, Colombia suffers through the most prolonged internal armed conflict in the region, one of the longest in the world, an ever more anachronistic and unexplainable conflict in light of the development of our democracy and our social progress.

Aware of this –and without neglecting protecting the safety of our citizens, without giving up an millimeter in the fight against terrorism and crime- my government has made the decision to move forward –prudently, seriously, firmly and without repeating the mistakes of the past- with conversations with the guerrilla to achieve an end to the armed conflict.

After two years of exploratory contacts, we have announced to the country and to the world the beginning of a talks phase on a short and concrete agenda, which we remain hopeful will lead to the desired outcome.

The talks will begin in Oslo in the first half of October and will continue in Havana, thanks to the good will of the governments of Norway and Cuba who will serve as guarantors.

We will also have the backing of the government of Venezuela –to whom we are grateful for their valuable support- and of the government of Chile, who will be with us starting now.

Today, before this General Assembly, I wish to thank the international community for the support they have expressed at outset of these talks, as well as for their willingness to help in whatever is needed.

We take on these talks with moderate optimism but with the absolute conviction that it is an opportunity that we cannot waste to reach what is not only good for Colombia, but for our entire region.

With regard to this statement, a few days ago I asked Colombians –through social media- which message they would like me to bring here, to the United Nations, and from the hundreds of messages received I want to share this one from Henry Rodríguez Chacón:

“An entire generation wants to wake up one day to the news of a peace agreement.”

That is the most heartfelt wish of Colombians!

Knowing that this process must have short deadlines and concise terms in order to be successful, I trust to be able to bring to this Assembly next year a positive balance of this effort we are taking on to achieve the end of our conflict.

We do not want to talk just about peace.

We want to build conditions for peace, and that is what we do every day with our government actions and with the talks we are carrying on.

Today we present the world –with hope- this new moment for Colombia.

Thank you very much.