

**Statement of Mark Wells, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State  
for the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, Before the  
House Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee for the Western  
Hemisphere: Colombia**

**Thursday, July 27, 2023, 2:00PM, 5 minutes**

Chairwoman Salazar, Ranking Member Castro, distinguished members of the sub-committee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss our current approach to Colombia, a historic U.S. ally in the region. As one of the oldest democracies and market-driven economies in Latin America, Colombia works closely with us to advance shared priorities in trade, security, migration, democracy, and climate, as well as the full implementation of Colombia's 2016 Peace Accord.

During their April 20 meeting at the White House, President Biden and President Petro reaffirmed the strategic importance of the U.S.-Colombia partnership based on principles of

friendship, mutual respect, cultural ties, and a shared commitment to democracy and human rights. The United States has proudly supported security, good governance, and rule of law for many years, which has contributed to Colombia's longstanding commitment to democracy. Our investments have paid dividends over the course of our partnership, enabling close cooperation under successive Colombian governments with differing political perspectives.

The U.S. and Colombian people enjoy the benefits of a successful economic relationship, built on the solid foundation of the U.S.-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement. Since the agreement took effect, U.S. trade with Colombia is near an all-time high. We engage closely with the Colombian government in the context of the agreement to improve labor and environmental standards.

The United States has been the strongest and most consistent contributor to the implementation of the 2016 Peace Accord, providing more than \$1.5 billion in assistance since 2017. We work closely with civil society, the private sector, and the Colombian government to prioritize the advancement and equity of women, girls, Afro-Colombians, and indigenous people, who have been disproportionately victimized by the conflict.

The United States and Colombia coordinate closely to address irregular migration, to promote safe and humane migration management, and long-term migrant socio-economic integration in Colombia. In April, President Biden and President Petro underscored our joint commitment to counter human smuggling in the Darién region. Colombia hosts more than 2.5 million Venezuelans, the largest number of displaced

Venezuelans in the region. In 2022, the United States programmed \$104 million to Venezuelan migrants in Colombia.

President Biden and President Petro committed to a comprehensive counternarcotics approach that includes interdiction, anti-money laundering, and rural economic development. We commend Colombia's efforts to expand land titling, which allows individuals in rural communities to own their own land and pursue economic alternatives to illegal drug cultivation. At the same time, we remain concerned about record levels of coca and cocaine production as well as alarming trends in homicides and violence that serve to undermine democracy. We are expanding and intensifying bilateral cooperation in intelligence and interdiction to dismantle transnational criminal networks and counter illicit activities that displace rural communities. Investing in

Colombian institutions that fight corruption and improve security and justice – like the Attorney General’s Office, the court system, Peace Accord transitional justice mechanisms, and the national police force – is a strategic priority that will protect both our peoples’ health, safety, the environment, the economy, and rule of law.

As the second most biodiverse country in the world, Colombia plays a vital role in addressing the climate crisis. The United States supports programs that advance environmental protection by countering the drivers of deforestation, supporting conservation of the Amazon, and promoting climate-smart agriculture practices.

In addition to our bilateral work, the United States and other democratic nations have a responsibility to stand up for

democratic principles and protect the rules-based international order. Colombia and the United States share a vision for a peaceful return to democracy in Venezuela and work closely to strengthen Inter-American institutions.

In conclusion, the Biden-Harris Administration is committed to ensuring that U.S.-Colombia relations remain strong and productive, for the benefit of U.S. citizens, the Colombian people, hemispheric stability, and the world. We have overcome many historic challenges together, and we are confident that our partnership will continue to thrive for many generations to come.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I welcome your questions.