

**Remarks as prepared to the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Subcommittee
on the Western Hemisphere**

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Chairman Duncan, Ranking Member Sires, Members of the Committee, thank you for convening this hearing to discuss the Colombian peace process. I appreciate your interest. In my view, the attention of this committee is representative of the deep and longstanding bipartisan support in Congress that has made U.S. policy towards Colombia so successful over so many years.

Colombians have suffered for more than half a century in the longest continuing military conflict in the western hemisphere. Over 225,000 Colombians have lost their lives. If that number were translated into U.S. population terms it would mean the death of 1.4 million of our citizens. Thousands have been disabled. Many of them are children. Just 2 weeks ago a 7 year old girl was killed when she stepped on an explosive device. Nearly 6 million Colombians have been displaced from their homes. Land and streams have been despoiled. Indigenous peoples and minority communities such as Afro-Colombians and other vulnerable populations have suffered the most.

The Colombian people want this war to end. President Juan Manuel Santos won re-election with a clear mandate to seek a negotiated settlement. He has pursued the peace with great courage and dedication despite political risk and costs. President Obama and Secretary of State Kerry have enormous respect for President Santos and confidence in his leadership. So when President Santos asked the President and the Secretary to raise the level of U.S. support and engagement with the peace process, they did not hesitate. I was appointed U.S. Special Envoy to the peace process in February.

I have been working on Colombian affairs since I served as Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs from 1989 to 1993. In my first week at the Department of State, the Government of Colombia sought and received \$50 million in additional military assistance to combat Pablo Escobar and the Medellin cartel's violent campaign against the Colombian state. The Administration and Congress on a bi-partisan basis passed the Andean Trade Preferences Act. I was

an early advocate of Plan Colombia and a strong visible supporter of the FTA. I have known President Santos for more than 20 years.

Let me briefly describe my role. First, I am the U.S. Envoy to the peace process, but I am not a negotiator or a mediator. I offer suggestions, share lessons learned from other peace talks, and explain U.S. interests. I respond to requests from President Santos and his negotiating team to exchange ideas and strategies. However, the negotiations are between the Colombian government and the FARC; the decisions are hammered out between the two sides.

Second, I am not a neutral party. I am participating at the request of and in support of the Colombian government. I coordinate my efforts closely with President Santos and his government.

As you know, the Colombian government has pursued peace negotiations with the FARC since October 2012. Cuba and Norway serve as “guarantor” countries, hosting, observing and facilitating the discussions. Venezuela and Chile serve as “accompanying countries,” receiving regular reports, and urging progress in the peace talks.

The agenda items agreed to by both Parties at the start of the talks are: (1) agrarian reform; (2) political participation; (3) illicit drugs; (4) justice and victims’ rights; and (5) disarmament/end of the conflict. The parties have reached partial and preliminary agreement on the first three items.

In December of last year the FARC declared an “indefinite and unilateral ceasefire.” In March, the government announced it would suspend aerial bombing in response. These decisions were followed by a significant drop in FARC violence, especially against infrastructure. In March, the parties agreed to cooperate on clearing landmines. And this month, agreement was reached on establishment of a Truth Commission.

However, on April 14, the FARC violated its own ceasefire in an attack in Cauca that resulted in 11 dead and 20 wounded Colombian soldiers. President Santos resumed bombing, after which the FARC formally suspended its unilateral cease fire. Since the ceasefire suspension, there have been 81 violent actions according to a leading security NGO, with an estimated 41 guerillas and almost 20 police and military killed.

FARC attacks in the past three weeks against electric power towers left an estimated one million people in the cities of Buenaventura, Tumaco, and Florencia temporarily without power. Their attacks on oil infrastructure have damaged the environment and cut water supplies to thousands.

We are at a difficult stage in the talks. But both President Santos and the FARC have remained at the negotiating table. The smaller, more urban based guerilla group, the National Liberation Army, has refused to enter a negotiation to date.

The talks could accelerate and lead to breakthroughs or the talks could falter and start to fail. What is clear, however, is that we must continue our engagement. As Secretary Kerry noted, “the United States is going to continue to stand by Colombians’ side in this journey.”

The United States’ strategic partnership with Colombia has progressively deepened, become more diversified, and has been strengthened. When in 1991 the United States was mobilizing an international coalition to reverse Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, Colombia, as a then member of the UN Security Council, stood side-by-side with us. As our international cooperation continued to deepen and mature, Colombia later provided personnel and training to help the Afghan government combat narco trafficking at the United States’ request. And today, Colombia and the United States are partners with Central America and Mexico in combatting narco trafficking and cartel violence.

There has been no clearer sign of the strength of the U.S. Colombian relationship than Plan Colombia. In the late 1990s, Colombia’s government, society, and institutions were besieged by the most powerful crime syndicates in the world and two guerilla insurgencies. In response, the U.S. government came together on a bipartisan basis to support Plan Colombia.

While the United States provided, resources, hardware, assistance and training under Plan Colombia, the Colombian government raised taxes and expanded their armed forces and provided the strategic leadership, the hard work, and the vision under former President Alvaro Uribe and then Defense Minister Juan Manuel Santos that transformed the balance of military forces in Colombia.

Under Plan Colombia, the number of insurgents has been reduced by two-thirds by military action and demobilizations. Homicides have dropped by nearly half from the peak in 2002. Annual economic growth has averaged above four percent over

most of the last decade. Millions have been lifted out of poverty. The World Bank listed Colombia as the best place to do business in the southern hemisphere.

Colombians deserve the credit for the transformation that took place in their country under Plan Colombia. Those successes I believe brought the FARC to the bargaining table. At a time when it is fashionable to lament that bi-partisan cooperation has disappeared, it is worth noting that Plan Colombia due to sustained bi-partisan support helped save a nation and an American ally. Whether the future brings peace, as we all hope, or the FARC refuses to take what may be Colombia's last opportunity for a negotiated settlement, it is vital that this bipartisan support continues.

Chairman Duncan, Ranking Member Sires, Members of the Committee, I am grateful for your strong support for the peace process and our partnership with Colombia.

I look forward to your questions.