



**Women's Foreign Policy Group
Embassy Series Event
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H.E. Carolina Barco
Ambassador of Colombia to the United States,
Former Foreign Minister of Colombia

The U.S.-Colombian Partnership

Patricia Ellis: Good evening. Welcome to all our members and friends and guests. I'm Patricia Ellis, President of the Women's Foreign Policy Group. We promote women's leadership and women's voices on pressing international issues of the day, and we do that through our directory of members, which is a great guide. Most of all we promote women's voices through our international issues programs such as our event tonight with Her Excellency Carolina Barco, the ambassador of Colombia to the United States. This program could not be timelier, and we are so glad. We have just a wonderful group here tonight.

In less than two weeks President Bush will be making a major trip to Latin America, and one of the key stops is his trip to Colombia. I think we're going to hear about this when the Ambassador speaks to us, and Ambassador Barco will be accompanying him during the leg of his trip when he is in Colombia. It's also been very busy here at the Embassy in Washington. They recently had their vice President here; they had the minister of defense here, and as I understand it, either tomorrow or the next day the Minister of Foreign Trade, Industry and Tourism will be in town to work on the Free Trade Issues. So there's been a lot going on. Needless to say, things are busy. I'd like to begin first of all by thanking Ambassador Barco for opening this beautiful home of hers. It's historic; I believe it's the hundredth anniversary of the home. It couldn't be a better location, right here in DuPont Circle, but it's just absolutely splendid and we're just so happy to have her here. It's a true privilege.

She is the former Colombian Foreign Minister and she's a real role model for women's leadership in international affairs, which is basically what this organization is all about. We regularly hear from women leaders. This year we had the Foreign Minister of Croatia, we had the Deputy Foreign Minister of Egypt, we honored the President of Liberia, which was certainly very special. And we also work very closely with the women ambassadors in Washington, and I'd like to welcome the Ambassador of Trinidad and Tobago, who is with us tonight. Thank you so much for joining us. We also have representatives, the Embassy of Japan, Hungary. I'd also like to introduce and welcome three of the Women's Foreign Policy Group Board members who are here with us tonight. If they could all stand so you know who they are: Dawn Calabria, Donna Constantinople, and Theresa Loar. I really am so lucky, I have a great board.

I just want to mention two upcoming events that we have. March 8th we are celebrating International Women's Day, and we going to have the Assistant Secretary General for Peacekeeping, Jane Hull Lute, as our speaker. Then in April we are going to be having the Under Secretary of State for management,

Henrietta Holsman Fore, who is going to be talking about transformational diplomacy, and all the changes going on with the State Department, so that should be really interesting.

Now it is my great pleasure to introduce Carolina Barco. As I mentioned, she is the Colombian Ambassador to the United States. She's been here since August 2006, and prior to that, she served as minister of foreign affairs from August 2002 until she arrived here. Colombia has a real history of having women ministers of foreign affairs; she is one of four female foreign ministers, which is really fantastic. Ambassador Barco has also worked in the public sector. She headed the City Planning Department in Bogotá, she advised the Ministries of Development, Culture, and Environment, and the National Planning department, the Office of the Mayor in Bogotá. She also worked as an international cooperation advisor to UNDP. Before I turn the program over to Ambassador Barco, I really want to thank my staff: Emily Harter, Kimberly Kahnhauser, and all the interns, Laura Escobar and Marta Jensen, from the Colombian Embassy, for their assistance in making this all possible tonight. Everything is so beautiful, and we wouldn't be here without them, so let's give them a round of applause. Now please join me in welcoming Ambassador Carolina Barco.

Ambassador Carolina Barco: Thank you very much for that very warm welcome. I would like to extend this warm welcome to all of you. I am delighted, Patricia, that you have allowed me to talk to this very selective group. And I hope this will be the first of many opportunities to maintain dialogue and to continue what I hope is a conversation we are going to hold tonight, about Colombia-US relations. I have prepared about a 20 minute presentation, because I think what it more important is to hear your questions and be able to answer them, so I want to just give a brief overview, and we can work from there. And I thank my colleague from Trinidad and Tobago for being here tonight. Thank you so very, very much.

So many Americans who know about Colombia have seen my country through only a single prism or issue—our relentless fight against drugs and violence—that it deflects against both of our societies. In a way, it affects the US in their health problems. In Colombia it affects our Democracy, and has very deep rooted effects. This is certainly what you hear the most about in the news, but while cooperation in fighting drugs and violence is an important part of our bilateral relationship, it is not what defines Colombia, nor what defines the dynamic partnership that exists between our two nations. Geography has made our two countries neighbors in this hemisphere, but it is the values we share, which has made us friends and partners. Colombia is the oldest democracy in Latin America, our democracy has been under attack by drug traffickers and terrorist groups for over 20 years, but we have never yielded. By contrast, democracy and respect for human rights, is today more embedded into our social and political fabric than ever before. This is important to remember now in 2007, which will be a crucial year in Colombian-US relations.

A new US Congress with democratic majorities in both chambers inherits a very robust Colombia-US relationship, one based on shared values and common strategic interests. This partnership has evolved over the last quarter of a century, across many fronts. In a shared fight against drug trafficking, most recently with a growing economic relationship, but also with an interest in promoting stability and integration within the Andean region and throughout the western hemisphere. Many Americans—democrats and republicans—over several of the administrations and congresses, and many Colombians of all political factions, have contributed to the dynamic relationship our nations enjoy today. The congress will consider this year two major initiatives that will advance and further cement our bilateral ties.

First, passage of a new strategy for strengthening democracy and social development in Colombia. This initiative will build the significant, successful efforts that Colombia and the United States have made over the past several years through Plan Colombia. You'll remember that Plan Colombia was set up by President Clinton, and approved by a republican congress. At that point we had a conservative President with a majority of liberal congress. Now we have the opposite. We have a liberal President; you have a republican President with a democratic congress. This goes to show that our relationship is based on a bipartisan relationship. And it's based not just on politics, but a state policy, and it reflects how important this strategic relationship is for both of us.

Second, for congress it's the ratification of a trade promotion agreement, which we might call a Free Trade Agreement. This is the way it is seen, talked about now, and sometimes we don't know if it is the same thing, but it is. This agreement has been negotiated over the past 3 years and will enhance already increasingly integrated economic relations between us. For Colombia, this is a very important agreement, as mentioned, for 3 years we have negotiated it. It was signed on the 22nd of November last year, and now it is up for discussion in both of our congresses. It is being debated in Colombia at present and we hope will be debated in the American congress, we hope, in this first semester. But I know that both democrats and republicans are working very hard on the new wording and the new concerns that there are, and that we look at the labor issue and so there is work going on right now.

We look forward to working with democrats and republicans in the U.S. Congress in the weeks and months ahead to continue to build this bipartisan support for these initiatives, both of which are important with the continued stewardship in our relationship. I was just meeting right now with Senator Durban and I was very impressed by how intelligent and reflexive he is, and he had something to say about women too. He said that he believed, as he traveled around, that governments that had lots of women in the government were governments that he had greater faith in. So give a round of applause for the women.

Colombia is a strategic ally of the United States and a reliable friend on the global stage. We have been a proven partner of the U.S. for more than two decades in a joint fight against illegal drugs and the violence it inflicts. We have also been very supportive of US global leadership of the war on terrorism, and its interests in the stability and peace of the Andean region because these are fundamental strategic interests that our nations share. In our relationship we have stressed the importance of maintaining that close working relationship with the U.S., but Colombia has also made a very concerted effort to maintain a close relationship, a working relationship, with its neighbors, and with its region. We believe we are much better friends of the US if we can act as their friends also with the region. And this, so far, has been a very important part of our foreign relations. The Colombian people and successive Colombian governments have made significant sacrifices to strengthen our democracy, improve human rights, and promote development.

Our government, our society, and economy have been under attack by powerful, wealthy organizations; Guerrilla and paramilitary groups, who do not seek to gain power through the ballot box where they would have no support at all, but through intimidation, violence, and terror, using kidnapping and landmines. Colombia has lost an entire generation of leaders, Presidential candidates, judges, attorney generals, and police men. We started this fight by facing up to the narco-traffickers at the end of the 80's and into the 90's when we lost 3 Presidential candidates in one year. We lost attorney generals, we lost governors. When we faced up to these drug traffickers, the powerful drug traffickers who felt that the money they had, the influence they had, would allow them to buy the country and run it.

In a way, this is a very courageous fight that Mexico is embarking on right now, which is facing up to some drug mafias which are very powerful. And the problem there is not only that they are only powerful because of the money they have to corrupt, they are very powerful because they have no qualms about violence. So many times the choice you get between a 100 million dollars and the kidnapping of your child is not a decision at all. I would like to speak up for the great effort that Mexico is making right now, and for the effort that we all have to make to support each other in this fight because it is a very unequal fight and one which has very deep consequences.

In Colombia we have never given up. In the past few years we have defeated or arrested thousands of drug traffickers, guerrillas, and self defense forces. More than 40 of these criminals have been extradited to the United States to face trial. At the end of last year, there was a very famous trial of the Cali cartel which came after Pablo Escobar, which many of you may remember, from Medellin. And we had the famous Cali cartel. They were sentenced here in the States in December and just 2 weeks ago, a member of the FARC, which is a illegal guerrilla group, and which is now narco-trafficking also, as are all of our illegal groups because this is where they get the illegal financing. Her name is Sonia, she has just been sentenced here in the States.

So for us it has been very important to have that kind of support that we have had with the extradition, because these are such powerful people that when Sonia had been captured, we couldn't even put her into a high security prison because we put into danger all of the prisoners who were in that prison. So we had to put her on a boat, a marine boat, and have her out in the ocean while we were waiting to extradite her because the FARC felt *so* strongly that she should not be extradited. These are the kind of challenges that we have when we are facing these kinds of powerful groups. We have invested more in our nation's self defense, we have raised taxes to finance more professional military and national police, and today these institutions are the most respected in the country. In those polls that they make about which institutions do you respect, Colombia is a Catholic country, the Catholic church is the most highly respected institution, but our armed forces are 2nd or 3rd, which just goes to show that because Colombia has always been a civilian government, we have not had a military dictatorships, our army is an army used to working within democratic measures, so it is an army that is facing these terrible conflicts but knows that it must act in a way that is responsive to a democracy.

American support there has been fundamental in Plan Colombia. You have given us helicopters with maintenance training, intelligence training, etc, which has been fundamental for our territorial control. Colombia has a very difficult geography because when the Andes come into Colombia it divides up into three, plus we have a whole part of our country that is just jungle, it goes into the Amazon, and whole pacific coast is also very deep jungle, so that this is why helicopters become fundamental in moving around in my country. This is the kind of support that we have gotten, and which has been fundamental for us.

But Colombia has also made an effort and in the first presidency of President Uribe he passed a tax on wealth. A tax only on property, etc. Now he's passed another tax on wealth for the 11,000 most wealthy companies and individuals and we will be raising 4.5 billion dollars in 4 years to pay for this. What is incredible is in the first round of this one, and we know the same right now, everybody paid because we all know that we are investing in the future of Colombia and so this was a tax that met with no resistance, even though we are talking about very important amounts of money. Especially millions of dollars in pesos, it's a big, big sum of money! We have intercepted and destroyed an estimated 15 Billion in illegal drugs in the past 4 years that is more than 600 metric tons. I can't quite imagine that, but those are tons of tons that did not reach American cities and schools and neighborhoods.

We are addressing the challenges of a part of our fight against illegal trafficking, such as corruption and we are also strengthening our justice system. Colombia has faced a problem with its justice system because since we have had this conflict, we have had a justice system overwhelmed by the number of cases, and overwhelmed by the system we had, which was a written system. One would make a statement, which was written down, and these were then passed to judges, etc, and all in a written system. We have now gone to an oral system that is based on the American system, which allows the trials to go faster. We have done this with the support of your justice department, and they have been very active in training the Colombian attorney generals, so that we can move faster and we started by parts in Bogotá and in one of our coffee regions. This year we are almost in all of the country.

This is helping to make our justice move faster. Since 2000, Colombia and the U.S. have invested in stability, democracy, and development. Through our joint Plan Colombia initiative, the U.S. provided approximately 4 billion in military and development aid, while Colombia has contributed about twice that amount. Plan Colombia, along with President Alvaro Uribe's own development and democracy programs, has put in place two trends that we see in Colombia today. Every indicator of violence in our society—homicides, kidnappings for extortion, massacres and acts of terrorism—have declined significantly in the last five years. Homicides have declined by 50%, Bogota for example, which had a 70 per 1000 homicide rate has gone down to 35. That's the same homicide rate that I believe a city like Washington or Mexico City now have. And this is because in our major cities we have really made a big difference. We have problems in the outskirts and outlying areas, which brings are rates higher, but we are really making a difference. We are very pleased that kidnappings and massacres have gone down by 80%. In January and February we did not have any kidnappings in the country [she knocks the wood of the podium] to knock on wood, but...So that we went down in the year 2000 from 3,000 kidnappings and last year we were down to 200. That's a significant percent, but 200 is still 200 people.

This is why what were are talking right now about continuing to work together because we are going in the right direction and what we need to make sure is that this will prevail, and that it [the rates] will continue to go down. Colombian authorities are taking back territory where traffickers and terrorists previously operated, and they are reestablishing law and order and providing all governments services: schools, health center, and police stations. The army goes in first to take control of the territory, but is followed *immediately* by a pool of these government services so that people receive all of the government attention and have government presence there. The other trend that we are seeing that has changed is the economic indicator. The one of violence is going down, that of economic growth is going up. And of course they are totally related. It's the decrease in violence, which is allowing our very industrious and hard working country to start producing at its potential.

Growth, employment, investment, and poverty levels are now moving in a positive direction. Growth, which had gone into a recession at the beginning of 2000, and which was 1.47% when President Uribe came in 2002, last quarter was 7% and the total of the year was 6.7%. That is an incredible growth rate and foreign direct investment was 8 billion the year before and 12 billion last year. I like to cite those two numbers just because behind them there is trust, confidence—people putting their money into the country and so that is very, very important. So what that has meant is that unemployment has gone down from 20% to 11%. We need to continue going down. And our inflation rate is a one digit, 6%. So we have a strong, growing Colombian economy, which is a critical component to achieving peace. And its an economy that is offering stability and security just like we have physical security. This is an economy that has stable laws and that's what you'll find in articles such as the one *The Economist* has; it suggests that investing in Colombia is a good idea because there is a regulatory system that is stable and that is clear for investment. The result of these two trends is that there is now confidence in Colombia and for the first time in a generation, Colombians believe that we are on the right path to peace. Our

nation is today united behind a leadership and a policy that is bringing real change and very definable progress.

At the beginning of President Uribe first period in 2002, the President not only proposed this democratic security policy, which is the one that we have seen, which has to do with territorial control and support of the Plan Colombia. He also wanted to address the problems of conflict in Colombia. We probably had more than 60, 000 illegally armed men in 2002. So he came in with a proposal to visit two illegal groups that we have, FARC and ELN, and with the AUCs, the self defense groups. And he said: 'I am going to regain this country, so I will go after you, but I also offer you the possibility of sitting down to discuss peace on certain terms.' As a result of this proposal, we now have self-defense groups who had initiated conversations before the President came in through the Catholic Church, making a peace process and demobilizing so that we have 30,000 men who have given up their arms. They are now unarmed and have given up their arms, and we have 58 leaders of these defense groups that are in jail. Because our peace process, different from the others that we had accepted, was based on a new law that we passed to address this issue. Colombia, in the past, has tried to reach peace at different moments, and so we have had amnesty and pardon with these groups. And that has worked well for the country. In a way it has allowed us at different moments to bring into the democratic system some of these members, and some of them have become congressman or mayors, etc.

But at this point in history we had faced such violence, because the drugs just change the violence in Colombia completely. When the drugs get into Colombia the kind of violence, the massacres we saw in the last decades, the kinds of killings we saw in the last decades, we had not experienced before. The drugs bring in a completely different kind of dynamic, so the country could not face a pardon and amnesty. For 2 years we discussed what a peace and justice law would be along which would require justice and require reparation to victims, because as a result of this conflict Colombia probably has more than 2 million people who have been displaced from their homes. They had to leave them because there was violence and many of them went first to a town near by, and then to a bigger city. And some of them are now returning, but many of them have stayed, and still have not returned. So this is one of the challenges that we have.

President Uribe made this offer and we now passed this law. It's an imperfect law as all laws are. Many people would like to see more justice; more people would like to see more peace. In fact, the ELN group, which is a left wing group which is now talking about the possibility of peace, thinks this is too harsh of a law and many consider that for the self defense groups this is too lenient a law. The problem is then that continuum of trying to reach peace *and* justice. You have to have enough just so that peace will be long-lasting, but to arrive at peace you have to have a justice, which allows for people to hand themselves over and to be willing to go to jail, but that there is something attractive to them so that they will want to make peace. So its difficult to continue. What we have approved was discussed for two years in congress, and was widely discussed all over the country, and it is now the basis for what we have going on at this moment.

We have 58 leaders in jail. the leaders of these groups handed themselves over, they have gone to jail, and their men who had not committed these crimes, are part of a demobilization program, and what we are doing there is carrying out the reintegration programs. This is a huge challenge. We have 30,000 men that we have to teach once again how to live in a democratic society, how to live in a peaceful way, how to solve problems with justice through conversations, not with arms. And in many cases, we have to teach them once again to read and gain the skills to be able to earn an honest living. So the success we had with the program of Plan Colombia which allowed us then to get these people to come and make peace, has created these challenges, which is trying to address with appropriate programs, this group, to

make sure that they come back into our society and are not tempted to go on into the drug programs again, because we have to remember that Colombia still has that problem, and we'll talk about it in a minute.

We're fighting it, but it's still there. We have a big challenge to make sure that we can provide these people an incentive. One is to be with their families, and that's a strong incentive still. But the other incentive is that they have a way of earning a living. So this is one of the components of the law that we have presented here in the States, that has to do with the consolidation, then, of this democracy and that we are talking about.

As a result of the trials that we have going on, and also of the continued push against these groups, and those 3 or 4 leaders, the most important one, that have not wanted to come to terms, and so are now considered criminals, have led to our finding out and addressing a problem that is very serious in Colombia. And it is what has been coming out in the news in these past few days, so that I would like to address it very directly. It is the influence of the paramilitary groups. This is a group that we have made peace with, but we have to remember that this is a group that has existed for 20 years. This group grew because 20 years ago there were places in Colombia, many farms, where the army was not able to provide the security that people needed to be able to be on their farms and so they were subject to the kidnappings and the extortion of the guerrilla groups.

In 1994, President Samper and his defense minister brought out a decree which allowed groups of farmers to come together and create a group to defend themselves. This was discussed, and some people felt we were going to go down the path of creating a group that might get out of hand, which is exactly what has happened. But, those who were trying to live honestly off their farms felt that this was the only way that they could address this problem of the insecurity, if the government couldn't provide this security, they needed to provide it within this legal framework. So we're talking about something that started 20 years ago, but that then started to change and grew out of hand. By 1997, these groups were declared illegal, and so they became illegal groups, but by then they had gained a lot of influence.

We had drugs in Colombia, so we had the left wing groups, the FARC, becoming very powerful with drugs; we had the left wing groups becoming very powerful with the drugs, so we had two fighting elements that have gained great strength in Colombia. As in 1986, when we faced up to the narco-traffickers, and we had to face up to the kind of power and influence that they had tried to gain in Colombia, and we found that they had infiltrated Congress; that they had taken over some mayor ships, etc. As we faced up to the self defense group issue, we're finding the same. We had a cancer that was there. We didn't know how deep or how strong. And what is important now is that Uribe is facing up to this issue and he is saying those in our civilian society who have been part of the criminal acts of the paramilitary will have to go to justice.

And because the message is so clear in Colombia, because we are either going after them, and have, for example, been able to get computers that they have, which has given us information about relationships between congressmen and Paramilitary groups in certain regions, so that last week we apprehended five congressmen. They've just been indicted, they haven't been sentenced. And it was the Supreme Court that had to indict them because congressmen have immunity in Colombia, so they cannot be judged by normal judges. That way, it has to go directly to the Supreme Court. They can only be judged by the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court then found in this computer, 10 or 15 congressmen who were going to be indicted. So they asked for help from the President, the President gave them the budget, so they have now set up a whole new investigation unit to be able to address this issue and to make sure that justice is done.

We're also finding out about wrongdoings from the confessions that these leaders are making. And we're also getting information from the fact that people now feel free to talk about this issue, because they know that justice is going to be done. So there's a case, for example, that is also troubling to us, but we *need* to face up to it because we *need* to clean up, get to the bottom of that rotten pot. And there was a case of a colonel who came out and spoke about his superior, who would go out on some raids with the self defense groups when he felt his men were strong enough and he needed more support. He would have never done this before because he didn't know what the consequences would be. Now he knows that what happened is that the defense minister based on a clear analysis of the information has asked his superior to leave the military forces, he has been apprehended, and he will be facing justice.

Colombia is now facing up to this problem and that is why you are hearing and continue to hear about problems with the self-defense groups and how much influence they had. I invite you to look at this not in the negative way of saying this is so terrible—it is terrible—but I would invite you to work with us and realize that what is important is that justice be done. We need international communication; support for the oversights to make sure that justice is done, and that we move forward. Colombia, in this way, needs also to address this part that has to do with strengthening our democracy, and so we are facing up to this issues, which is very painful, but which not only the government, but Colombian society has to face up to. I think we are in the same challenge we had in the 80's with drug traffickers. This is the drug traffickers with another rope and we need to face up to it once again and we need to do it as a society, and the message has to be that this is not acceptable, just like drug traffickers in Colombian society did not find approval.

It may sound very strange that I am saying this, but when drug money starts arriving in a society, some people are very tempted by it because that house you have that is worth 5 dollars, they will pay 100. That farm you had that you were really not able to do very much with, they'll buy for a thousand, and people do not realize what they are doing by accepting this kind of situation. And you just need them to say: "NO, I'm not selling my house, I'm not selling my car, and I'm not going into politics with you. I'm not going to accept your money for my cab. I'm not." And this is a hard decision, because usually it's accompanied by violence. Right now we are facing the same problem we've got into with the paramilitary and what we're going on now if facing up to. So, I invite you, as you read these news stories, to think of the larger framework. Of what Colombia is trying to do, and yes, we are not happy, we are not pleased, that this happening in our country, but now that we know it did we need to get out and we need to address it.

As I finish, I would just like to say that the two pieces of legislation that are out before congress at present and very important to Colombia because it is a way that we can consolidate then the security and territorial control that we have improved in, as the indicators show. It is also not more of the same because what we are asking for is support to address the problem of the displaced; to address the problem of the demobilized; to address the social infrastructure that needs go into these places where we now have made peace and to strengthen our economy because we need to produce 30,000 employment opportunities for these people. We need to make sure that the 600,000 jobs that we created with the preferences that you have been giving us are there. We need the rules that will allow us to continue with investments, such as the one we've had, which has lead to the creation of a million jobs in the last 4 years. And this is the Free Trade Agreement. It's a free trade agreement that has been worked on for 3 years. It is very balanced. I'm not the expert, but I will repeat what the Farm Bureau what the trade commission, and what others have said. They consider that this is a trade agreement that is balanced, that is good for the United States, and is good for Colombia.

So as you walk out and speak to others, speak up to the importance of these agreements for Colombia because really they will allow us to continue along this wonderful path of success of which the U.S. has been a very important part. We feel our friendship is fundamental, but we can be very strategic together and this greater stability for Colombia that you are helping us achieve, is stability for the hemisphere. And so I invite you to join me in talking about these issues. They're not easy and that's why I would appreciate it now to be able to answer your questions, and please ask any questions you have because I know that's its difficult to understand Colombia, but believe me it's a country which is fascinating. It is very beautiful and diverse in its geography. We even have, in the northern part, we even have desserts and we have the Amazon jungle. We have people from all the different places. We are a real melting pot. We have 1 million, at least, Colombians living here in the U.S., working very hard. We have singers such as Shakira and Juanes many of you have heard, know that that's important. We have Cages, Garcia Marcus with his wonderful book, *100 Years of Solitude*, and sometimes our stories sound like 100 years of solitude, but we're trying to get out of the solitude and get into the mainstream, so thank you very much for listening and for being here today.

Question: I'm Teresa Loar from the Women's Foreign Policy Group Board. Thank you for opening your beautiful home tonight and thank you, to your sister ambassador, for her presence. I have two questions. First, as a member of the business community, what can we do to help you with your efforts and to get congress to get the trade agreements that you're interested in. And my second question is as a mother of young men, when is Shakira coming to Washington?

Ambassador Barco: I have my wonderful helpers here. M. Jensen who we call Mooney, and Laura who helped me not only with the cultural event—important ones like yours—and ones like Shakira. So we're working to see what you can do to bring them. Shakira and Juanes—they both are so well known for the music, but also for being Colombians. And they are so proud. And Juanes has taken on a very important campaign, which is against the landmines. Unfortunately, the legal groups have decided to use as their main way of fighting our society, is placing landmines. It costs 5 dollars to produce a landmine, and you can do it with anything; with scraps of shrapnel, or whatever. It takes 145 dollars to be able to de-mine and find where it is. And who is getting hurt? Its civilians or its young men and women. Your wonderful doctors, they're receiving some of our men who were so totally deformed. Who were left without arms and legs. Or there faces were torn apart. So we are working hard on this. Juanes has just been so wonderful to speak out on this issue. And Shakira also works with a lot of displaced children. So what's wonderful is that they're great singers, and we all love them because of the way they sing, but as Colombians we love them because they are wonderful Colombians who have not forgotten that they are Colombians and are taking advantage of this wonderful success they have to share it with others and so we'll see what we can do. Not only children, we would also like to have a chance to see her!

The first question had to do with the business community. You've played a very important role. Senators listen to you much more than they listen to me. When they listen to me I think they believe me part of the time, I hope most of the time, but they really believe their bus community. If you can go out and express that it is important, either because you have a business in Colombia and there I would ask to you also to talk about what it is like to do business in Colombia; the fact that there are clear rules; the fact that our labor laws are very clear also, and are respectful of labor. These are all issues that are wonderful. If what you do is import our products, also let them know that this works in advantage for their districts. So having you speak out is very powerful. You're a very powerful voice. And I would invite any business, if you want to work with us.

We are working with the business coalition, U.S. Chamber of Commerce; we are also working with a Hispanic group. We're trying to, and we have found, fortunately, a lot of support from the private sector, precisely because it is a trade agreement that is seen as beneficial by everybody and in the agricultural sectors, which is always the most delicate. We have the Farm Bureau behind us, and that has been very, very important because, you see, our agriculture is complimentary. Since we are tropical, we are buying the corn from here, we're buying the wheat from here, and we're buying the electronics. What we are selling you is things you cannot produce here, which are the tropical fruits, the pineapple or the wine...Hawaii can produce pineapples, but we want more pineapples so Colombia does it also. Bananas, and a lot of other tropical fruits that we are selling here. So, I would ask you to speak out. Your congressmen will listen to you a lot and that is very, very important.

Question: I had the wonderful opportunity of visiting Colombia last month with my family. I visited Cartahamen and as an American citizen I was frankly surprised, because as you say, the image of Colombia, was truly not that in Cartahamen. Rather than being offered drugs, we couldn't get away from the emerald dealers. It's a wonderful experience and I was pleased as I left Cartahamen that my luggage was searched thoroughly, and I saw Plan Colombia's dollars in action. And as an American, I think it is important to visit and see exactly how it is working. The question I have is about the drug trade. It is very similar to what we in the U.S. went through with our organized crime in the 1950's, 60's, and 70's with the mafia, the infiltration, the political donations, the drug trade, and my question is: Is the U.S. Department of Justice, in any way, working with your law enforcement to teach them lessons learned about what we did to bring in organized crime leaders, and to talk about dealing with it?

Ambassador Barco: We work very closely with your office, with your Justice Department, with the attorney general's office also, in many different ways. One, which has to do with corruption with money laundering. Colombia at this point has one of the best money laundering systems and we worked on that with you. We have specialized police that deal with the drug trafficking. We have special police that deal with the kidnappings. We have a lot of exchange programs through which we have learned from you, and now what we are doing is sharing it with our neighbors. We have programs in which our police are helping the Central Americans. We've been asked for support from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, from Paraguay—who had that very sad case where they kidnapped the daughter of the President and she was found dead. We've been helping them. What Colombia is trying to do now, is with the unfortunate expertise we had to gain, share with others and try to work, try to reach out, to the Caribbean.

We have learned a lot from you and now we are able to share it. One of the areas we are also exchange information is with Afghanistan. They have sent over some of their leaders to see what it is that we have done in Colombia. And why it is that, for example, that in Colombia we have sprayed and we have also done manual eradication. When President Uribe came in the year 2002 there were 160,000 hectares of Coca. I don't know the amount is in Afghanistan right now, but this is a huge amount. And these were in areas that were out in the rainforest, because the drug traders there felt that there was no problem. The government wasn't there, they could plant these huge areas, they were flying out with their planes, and there was no problem. So these drug dealers, with the guerillas, were there. There was no way we could put in our people to eradicate manually, because they were going to be killed. And we didn't have....in Bolivia, for example, when they put in men where there was insecurity they had 10 soldiers for one eradicator. We didn't have the number of people to do that. So spraying for us was a solution. It sent a very clear message, it said: "there is nothing off grounds. Our policy is zero tolerance." And this is how we exercised it.

On top of this, spraying is done with a product which is called “round-up,” which I believe is used in many homes and used for agriculture, and it’s been around for a long time. It is used in a stronger strength, but apparently not that much stronger than what they use with bananas and some other products. And we’re doing it with Environmental Protection Agency guidelines. There have been two studies carried out by the OAS, which show that this Round Up does not have a midterm effects. Apparently, it disintegrates very quickly, so that in 2 or 3 or days, if you were to be sprayed by the Round Up, your body eliminates it very quickly. The same happens in the water as on the ground.

We understand the concern, and we continue to allow any study that needs to be carried out to be carried out. We are talking now about another study carried out by the OAS. We wouldn’t be spraying Colombia if we thought we were hurting them. And we’ve been doing this now for 4 years. What we have found that this is very effective in sending a first message. Immediately, we had to go in with proposals for other kinds of products. And part of the problem as I understand in Afghanistan, is that they just spray and then people don’t have a product and they don’t have an alternative. And they need the money. What we are trying to do is to share with them—the government—is that you need to think of the whole circle. Go in, and spray, or go in and manually eradicate, but then come in and give them programs with options. And we worked on different kinds of options.

For example, in the jungle area—and we all know how fragile of an ecosystem the jungle is—those huge trees live off the air, they don’t live off the soil. It’s not a deep soil. When you cut down the jungle, it is not fertile for very long. In fact, this is why, when you look at indigenous groups, there’re constantly moving from one place to the other, because the land is not fertile. So, there, what the President did was set up a program, which is called “Forrest Wardens,” and what he did in these areas where you can not go in with commercial products is get a whole community—100 or 200 families—to agree to give up producing coca, and to manually eradicate. You want 200 for two reasons. So that they can face up with the support of our security systems—up to the drug lords. You don’t want one or two families because they are going to be penalized. And also, because it puts social pressure—because they get paid ever y six months when a UN representative goes in and sees that there are no drugs. So you have 200 families saying: “we are going to get paid every 6 months, you better not do anything.” And everybody, sort of, works together.

We have now 55,000 families in this program. This is more than 300,000 people and that has worked very well, as we are recuperating part of this lung that we had lost. We have lost over 1 million hectares of rainforest. And what we need to do is recuperate, what has also been an environmental catastrophe. In other areas, where we are close to roads, where you can market products, there we are working o productive products and in this way addressing the different conditions of the different parts of the country. We have now four different visits between one and the other, and we are working to share, just as you shared with us, with others who are facing the same problems.

Ms. Ellis: We have a few other questions; I’m going to take them together.

Question: I am Deborah McCarthy, U.S. Department of State and I just wanted to commend you, in terms of your current job and your last job, and the members of your government and President Uribe, for truly having fought and continuing to fight a great scourge. I’ve been in the helicopter, and down on the ground, and have seen what they are doing—it covers all fronts. But I wanted to ask one question. The example that your country has show in terms of the tax that the wealthy are willing to pay is quite unique, not only in this hem but beyond. I was wondering whether the government has considered it as an example. Because this hemisphere faces a number of scourges, not just drugs, and you do not find another country with the same commitment or willingness to pay for it.

Question: My name is Lauri Fitz-Pegado I am from the Livingston Group. I worked with the foreign minister under President Uribe and I'd like to also commend you and your government for the efforts that they have made in an area of Afro-Colombian development, especially in regards to economic development, and ask you about that issue, since Colombia is second only to Brazil in Latin America for having the largest amount of Afro-centrists. I would also like to make a suggestion to you on the Free Trade Agreement. We have 43 black Americans in Congress who are very interested in the issue of Africans and the Diaspora. Colombia has a major role to play, and has played in that regard. Five of those members are chairmen of major committees on the Hill. 15 of them are sub-committee chairs. One of them is running for President. Several of them are on the Foreign Affairs Committee and Foreign Relations Committee. I think you have an opportunity, in this Democratic congress to reach them with a message of the great progress on Afro-Colombian issues and to ask for the support for the Free Trade Agreement, based on that message.

Question: Dawn Calabria, Women's Foreign Policy Group Board. Colombia is know for the progress the legislature has made on human rights issues, specifically the rights of the internally displaced. Colombia has 2 million internally displaced, but one of the problems has been that the services to that population have not kept pace with the legal progress that has been made. And I wondered if President Uribe has made any plans to beef up the services, and help people go back home.

Question: Donna Constantinople, Women's Foreign Policy Group Board. I know that the democratic congress that you face on the Free Trade Agreement is largely concerned about the labor issues. I was wondering if you could tell us what a couple of those deep concerns are, and how you're going to answer those.

Question: Jerry Hagstrom, National Journal. I should first note that I am friends with Pat Ellis after being introduced by one of you Colombian Cultural counselors here in Washington, many years ago. So I owe my friendship to Pat on Colombia. The question that I have, since you are talking about the Free Trade Agreement, is this: I am wondering how much the atmosphere of the Free Trade Agreement in Congress today is due to the change in power in congress, and the questions people have about that, and how much is due to the concerns that members have due to the recent publicity about corruption problems in Colombia.

Question: Winston Haythe, EPA. First I want to say that of all ambassadors I think I've heard speak in this city—and there have been quite a few—I have never heard someone more candid and excellent than you this evening. I teach at George Washington Law School, and when you were mentioning how Colombia has gone from a written system to an oral system, with our justice department helping, I'm wondering, is this kind of a temporary fix or is this planned for the long term, because we think our system is too slow. But it's nice to hear that it can be helpful.

Question: I did a project in Colombia for the US trade development agency on trade immersion and I was very excited to talk about developing rural areas of Colombia, we're talking small businesses; building businesses so they can build trade with the United States. I was talking about trade promotion. Is this Free Trade Agreement going to help the people in Colombia with their economic development?

Ms. Ellis: Okay, these last two questions, one is domestic and one is regional. You talked about one side of the problem in Colombian, the right wing paramilitaries. There was an offer in the last few days from the Left regarding the release of the Presidential candidate Isabel Betancourt. I'm just wondering what your country's position is at this time, regarding such types of negotiations, the other relates to your

neighbor, Venezuela. Pres Bush is going to the region; I was telling someone earlier, I was reading the wires, and President Chavez was saying: the efforts to divide Latin America are just not going to work. Furthermore, yesterday, President Chavez announced the take-over of foreign oil companies and I am just wondering if this might have an impact on your country, since you also have a lot of oil and energy.

Ambassador Barco: Let me start by addressing the issue of Betancourt, just because it's an issue that I didn't talk about, and I think merits talking about. This has to do with people who have been kidnapped, that we have talked about in general. Isabel Betancourt was a candidate to be President when we ended the peace process with FARC. This is really very ironic. When President Pastrana was going then to retake that place where we had taken over, Betancourt decided to go by land, and she was taken by the FARC. This was 5 years ago, but she's one of 3,000 thousand who are there, and one of 60 who are being held for political reasons. She's at one in which there are also three Americans being held.

President Uribe has said to the FARC that he is willing to have an agreement with him, by which he will hand over some of their leaders, who are in jail, but who have not committed crimes against humanity, and they hand over some of the political kidnappees that they have. And he has placed us on board four years ago, and has allowed different speakers to try and reach out to them: Ex-President, ex-peace advisors. Recently, for the past year and half, Spain, Switzerland, and France have been working as go-betweens, between the FARC and the government, trying to see if we can't reach an agreement. The problem is that what the FARC is saying that they will only hand them over, if once again they can have a de-militarized zone, where they are present, but our army is not present. And the President says: there is no way I can hand over a piece of the country over to this group because I'm handing over my sovereignty and the hard fight of my military has been very, very difficult.

He proposed, on the other hand, that why don't they both demilitarize and then we will have international groups there providing the security if they felt that needed security. But they wouldn't be armed there, and the government unarmed, we would both be unarmed, because we were creating a space to hand over our different groups. That has not been accepted by them. The other condition that the President has placed, and has not been accepted, and these are the two main reasons that we have not been able to move ahead, is that President Uribe said: I am willing to let go of these people if they don't go back to the guerilla. There is no way that I caught them, put them in jail, and now I just hand them over to go back to fight. If France, who has expressed willingness to take some of them in, or other South American countries have expressed the interest, that's fine, or if they sign up for a program in which we can, where they have to sort-of come in every so often to make sure they are still around, I am willing to do that. What I am not willing to do is to let these people get out of jail, and go back to fighting. And that they haven't accepted.

But those are two conditions that, for our country, for our people, who have been fighting them, become really necessary conditions. But, President Uribe has let this group, and right now the international group, as well as others who come in, continue the conversation and see where we're going, but we haven't found any real way. The mother of Isabel Betancourt will be in Washington next week; she's coming up to talk at the Inter-American Human Rights Commission. She wants to talk about the issue of the kidnappees, and so maybe some of you will have a chance to hear her. I know she will be making some presentations. But what is important there is to remember that Betancourt's situation is very painful, but hers is one of many, and what we need to work on is to see how we can motivate the illegal groups to hand these people over. It is they who are holding them back, and these are the two conditions that have kept us from coming any closer.

I won't go into quite as much depth with the others, but this is an issue that has been very difficult. It has been a very difficult issue, for example, in our relationship with France, for example because she is also a French citizen, and so in our conversations with the French government, we have reiterated that we agree with them that this is very painful, but this is why we have given them the possibility to go in and work something out. But it hasn't been possible, and I think now they realize the difficulties we are facing.

We had several questions on the Free Trade Agreement. The Black Caucus, you are so right, is a very powerful and wonderful group. We have been working very closely with many of the members of the black Caucus. To begin with, I would like to say that the leadership that Congressman Rangel is giving to the Ways and Means is very impressive. He is trying to create a consensus; he is interested in moving ahead, the problem is that—and that was one of the questions I got about labor—is that at this moment the basic discussion is not with the countries that want the Free Trade Agreement, its among your government, because the FTA conditioned on labor, which would be binding for the US also, have to be agreements which both the Democrats and Republicans feel comfortable with.

There is no way that you can pass a Free Trade Agreement just with a democratic vote or republican vote. To pass a Free Trade Agreement you need members of both parties. So what is taking place right now is a conversation between the administration and the democratic and republican parts of Ways and Means, and Finance. And so Senator Baucus and Senator Grassley and Congressman Rangel and Congressman McQueary, with USTR, are not talking about what that language will be. Once we know that language, we will know what it is that the democrats would like to see in the existing language of the treaties. We realize that there are concerns, and our government is willing to take them into consideration. With labor issues, Colombia has another issue that we have been addressing, which has to do with the fact that one of the groups that is affected by the kind of conflict and violence we have in Colombia, are labor members. And there are some groups that have been especially affected: teachers, councilmen, journalists, and labor leaders.

There is a strong correlation between deaths and conflict areas, but that does not explain everything and that does not excuse anything. So we need to address this problem as we address the general problem, but we also need to address this problem with respect to these special groups. So we have a special program that gives security to any labor member who feels that they are threatened. And we are spending 25 million a year on this program, and we offer either bodyguards or armored cars or bullet-proofing of offices. Or those who have a very difficult situation, we will take them out of the city where they are, they will live in another one, and we will pay for them to go out to where they live to carry out their activities once or twice a month.

And the other thing that we're doing, because of concern about the way justice has worked, there is a program that we have set up in the framework of the ILO, in which we have sat down with the labor leaders and looked at the cases that were pending, and have decided with them, which they consider a priority, which they would like to be addressed faster. And we have a special unit at our attorney general's office, which is now looking at these issues and seeing how we can move them ahead. So we are trying to address that problem, one, by being proactive and trying and prevent these deaths, but if they do, we're trying to address the problem of justice also. So this is how we are dealing with that other part of the labor issue, related to Colombia, which is different from the wording which is still being worked out, and there we don't know exactly where things stand and where the situation stands, although we know that we will have to address it, and we understand we have to address some labor concerns that democrats might have.

The problem right now with the labor issues and with Colombia is more that first we need to find out where the situation stands. We know, more than the corruption, we know that we need to talk with a lot of members about what we are doing to address the problem of violence. In the case of Colombia, what we feel very strongly, and that's why it's important for those who have businesses to talk about the labor situation in Colombia, because if we're looking the way that the general labor works, we have very high standards, and we're a country that is very respectful, yet we're a country that has a problem of violence, and one of the groups that is affected is labor members. But, we are addressing the problem as a whole, and we are addressing this problem specifically, and what we need to do is continue to work towards greater stability in the country, so that we hope that all of the indicators will decrease and we will pay special attention labor leaders, which is merited of course.

When you live in my country, and you realize what you need is to have a safe country to make sure that your business will work, that you can live in peace, that your children are safe. Paying that tax....I was a member of the cabinet at that moment, and it was the beginning of President Uribe's term. President Uribe started his first term, and we were aware looking at our budget, and the first six months we didn't know whether we were going to be able to pay our wages. We found a very difficult situation in our budget. Fortunately, we had a very good finance minister who had been at the World Bank and the IMF and knew how to deal and restrict, and we are now fine and buoyant. But we were paying 60% of our GNP in interest, so we were way up. And so the President said we need to address the problem of the military. So what do we need to do: a tax on the wealthy.

He called the agricultural sector: would your members be willing to do this? Yes. He called the association of industrialists: would you be willing? Yes. In one cabinet meeting we drew up this law, and the next day there was this had complete support, but it's also because people were really looking out for their interests, and for the country that they wanted. And since they've seen that it has worked well, this is, I am sure, why in the second time were asking them to make this effort, they once again have come through. One, the important thing is that people feel that it is a law, it is a tax, that they will see the results. And two, they need to see the results if you plan to use it again. And Venezuela, he says that Venezuela will make efforts so that we are not going to be divided, and we are all making efforts so we will not be divided. I think the region is seeking a way to work in as a constructive a way as possible, as long as we are respectful of our sovereignties.

What we are seeing are different models of ways to handle government, and we see different forces in the region. It really isn't a left-right issue, because you have countries such as Chile that has supposedly a left government, but with very serious orthodox ways of handling their economy. You have a country that has a trade unionist as President such as Brazil, also handling the government in a very serious way. I think we all need to be concentrating our efforts in South America on addressing the social issues we all have because this is a continent where there are great disparities between rich and poor, and I think this is one of the major challenges we have. We saw that not only among countries, but we are seeing it internally. The elections in Peru attest to that. The poor south is very different than the rich north. In Mexico, we saw the same situation. I think that a real challenge is not so much whether we are going to be divided as to whether our countries are going to be able to address these problems of bringing our countries and as a region trying to work on a model that will be constructive and help us move ahead.

Ms. Ellis: Ambassador, I know I speak on behalf of everyone here when I thank you for your candor, your simulating presentation and want to make you officially a member of the WFPG. You have a mug and a directory. Thank you so much.

Ambassador Barco: Well I look forward to being inspired with my first cup of Colombian coffee in the morning! Thank you very much and thank you for listening.