



LATIN AMERICA TRADE COALITION

Colombia: A Country Moving Forward

Few nations in the world have changed as much in recent years as Colombia — to the tremendous benefits of its citizens. Consider the country's transformation:

Jobs: Colombia's unemployment rate has fallen from 20% in the late 1990s to single digits in recent months. Three million jobs have been created since 2002, when the U.S. Congress further opened the U.S. market to Colombian exports through the Andean Trade Promotion and Drug Eradication Act — underscoring the power of trade as an effective alternative development program.

Education and Health Care: Fully 88% of Colombian children are enrolled in school, up from 71% in 2001. Currently, 73% of Colombians have health care coverage, up from 54% in 2002. In 2006, the government's budget for education, health care, and social programs was \$12.7 billion, a substantial sum given Colombia's \$100 billion GDP.

Public Safety: Colombia's homicide rate was cut in half and kidnappings were reduced by almost 90% over the past five years. Law and order have been restored in rural municipalities. More than 4,000 labor leaders, judges, human rights workers, and journalists benefit from program that provides for their personal security.

Human Rights: Colombia's armed forces have received extensive human rights training — more than those anywhere else in the Americas. No member of any brigade receiving U.S. training has been convicted of human rights violations. Partly as a result, 81% of Colombians express respect for the armed forces — more than for any other institution.

National Reconciliation: Colombia is disarming both left-wing and right-wing armed groups. The government has made dozens of peace overtures to the FARC and ELN, Marxist guerrilla groups that have fought the government for four decades. The right-wing paramilitaries have been disarmed, with more than 40,000 fighters demobilized. As a *Washington Post* editorial noted: "At last, the paramilitary network in Colombia and its military and political alliances are being exposed and uprooted" (3/15/07).

Narcotics Trafficking: Coca production in Colombia has been reduced by 40% over the past decade, according to the U.S. Office of National Drug Control Policy. Since 2000, Colombian security forces have interdicted cocaine and heroine shipments with an estimated street value between \$35 billion and \$40 billion.

How Did This Happen? President Uribe's principled leadership and the determination of the Colombian people have been bolstered by U.S. support through the Andean trade preferences and Plan Colombia. As the *Post* concludes, "Colombia's president can deliver on his promise to reform the country's political system and extend its authority to a long-lawless countryside. If Congress wishes to see those changes continue, it should approve the new Colombian aid plan as well as the free-trade agreement."

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