

Statement by President Álvaro Uribe from Guatemala

Ciudad de Guatemala, January 14 (SP).

"I would like to thank all the Governments and people who have supported Colombia's democratic struggle against terrorism. We thank these Governments who have proceeded in accordance with UN and OAS regulations.

According to these regulations, the violent groups of Colombia are terrorists because such violent groups kidnap people, recruit and abuse minors and attempt to harm against pregnant women and the elderly.

Yesterday the terrorist group Farc, kidnapped six tourists in the Pacific Coastal area of the country. Notwithstanding the security improvements of our nation, we still encounter such difficulties.

The terrorist groups of Colombia plant bombs against the civilian population. UN and OAS qualified the bomb placed by Farc in 2003 at the Club Nogal of Bogotá as a terrorist act.

According to UN and OAS regulations, since the violent actions of such groups are financed by drug-trafficking, they are mafia groups, they are terrorist groups.

It is also important to show our appreciation for the support our democratic struggle has received these last days, for this support is consistent with the statements of the EU, which classifies these groups as terrorist groups.

I must remind you that a few days ago, on December 20, 2007, the EU confirmed the terrorist classification for the violent groups of Colombia; the Governments of Canada and the United States of America also declared them terrorists, along with the OAS and the UN for their terrorist acts.

In showing our appreciation for the support our country has received from so many Governments and so many people, I would also like to say that Colombia, the people of Colombia deserve this support, for they have implemented a security policy based on democracy, not on dictatorship.

This is substantially different from the other guerrillas that operated throughout the continent before, for such guerrillas were legitimate to a certain point due to their struggle against dictatorship. In Colombia, guerrillas and paramilitary groups have abused democracy and financed their operations with illegal drugs.

Colombia's struggle against the violent groups is based on a democracy, not on a dictatorship, and that makes the Nation deserve the international support it has received lately.

Colombia deserves this support for all of the efforts made in its quest for the humanitarian release of those kidnapped, as I just reminded Madame Vice-Minister of France (RamaYade), who forwarded a letter from President Sarkozy.

It was upon the request of President (Nicolas) Sarkozy that the Government of Colombia released

Rodrigo Granda, the most important member of Farc who was imprisoned; the response of Farc was the murder of 11 Representatives of Valle del Cauca.

The Government of Colombia unilaterally ordered the release of 177 members of Farc, as a gesture in good faith to achieve the release of those still held hostage by Farc.

Colombia deserved the support it has received these last few hours, because Colombia has the moral authority, after having faced all the terrorist groups. Colombia has dismantled para-militarism and has weakened the guerrilla. This is very important.

This gives us the moral authority to request to the International Community, to indicate that the support received by Colombia from within and from the International Community must be for our democracy and against all violent groups. It must be supportive against all violent groups; it may not be supportive of certain violent groups and against the Government of Colombia in favor of other violent groups.

The guerrillas have been as terrorists as the paramilitary groups. Which is why there cannot be criticism for some and indulgence for others – they must all be equally condemned – and we thank the International Community for doing so, such as the statements of the UN and the OAS, the EU, Canada and the United States.

Colombia deserves this support, because it is firm in its security and generous with peace. This Government has witnessed the demobilization of over 46.000 members of violent groups, who have been treated generously.

During the first 14 days of this year, 94 members of the guerrilla have turned in, most of them members of Farc, and they are being treated generously by this Government of Colombia.

Colombia is firm in its security and generous with peace. It has been over four years now since four members of ELN, the second guerrilla, were acknowledged by the Government of Colombia as political spokespersons for ELN. The warrants for their arrest were suspended in order to facilitate the negotiations, negotiations that have been carried out by the Government of Colombia in good faith.

Whenever Farc so desires it, when they start to display good faith in their actions wanting to negotiate for peace, the Government of Colombia shall be ready to offer them all the benefits part of our Constitution and facilitate such peace process, and as soon as the negotiations make some progress, the Government of Colombia shall be the first to refrain from calling them terrorists and the first to request the world to do the same as a contribution to peace.

I would like to remind the world that Colombia has started to make financial and social progress because security has made progress, since drug-trafficking guerrillas have been weakened and there has been a very important process in which the drug trafficking paramilitary groups have

been dismantled.

This experience: the greater the security, the greater the social and financial prosperity; this experience: while the terrorist groups are weakened, Colombia starts to prosper, which leads to one conclusion: humanitarian issues may not obstruct security.

This is why I just explained to Madame Vice-Minister of France, sent by President Sarkozy, that the path opened by the Government of Colombia in order to release the hostages that are still held hostage by Farc, is that of the negotiations area with the mediation of the Catholic Church, which has proposed such negotiations area.

A negotiations area in a rural region, without any population. An area without any population or military or police facilities. I must remind you that Colombia has 578 thousand square kilometers of forest alone.

I was explaining to Madame Vice-Minister of France, sent by President Sarkozy, that the humanitarian path for the release of those still held hostage by Farc is that of the negotiations area proposed by the Catholic Church, a proposal which has been accepted by the Government.

The world must bear in mind all those who have been murdered by Farc: the 11 Representatives of Valle del Cauca, the groups of kidnapped persons, among which was the former Minister of Defense, Gilberto Echeverri and the Governor of Antioquia, Guillermo Gaviria, along with 9 members of the Armed Force.

The world must bear in mind that those who are still kidnapped by Farc are subject to torture, which only strengthens the arguments to classify Farc as a terrorist group.

The latest testimonies regarding such tortures were given by the two persons who were recently released: Ms. Consuelo González de Perdomo and Ms. Clara Rojas. They have told the world that part of those hostages, the members of the Police and Military Forces and the political leaders are held chained and in cages. This is an inadmissible torture; an aggravating circumstance of this terrorist kidnapping.

The world must know and must remember that in the last 10 years, 750 people kidnapped by Farc have still not returned to their homes. Today, they must be considered missing; another infamy of the terror of Farc.

Upon reception of the letter of President Sarkozy, and in my conversation with the Vice Minister sent by President Sarkozy, I indicated that the path is that of the negotiations area proposed by the Catholic Church; a proposal which has been accepted by the Government of Colombia.

We shall continue to work with the Catholic Church in our quest for this path".

(End)

