

PEACE IN COLOMBIA AND THE THIRD WAY IN LATIN AMERICA

Juan Manuel Santos

THE WORLD is experiencing a rise in collective anxiety similar to that which we witnessed 15 years ago after the attacks on the United States.

This time around, however, many of the major conflicts at the center of international attention seem more puzzling than before. Global and regional powers and non-state actors on every continent pursue their interests in increasingly complex and changing environments, empowered by new uses of technology in order to achieve their aims.

War, terrorism, and violence threaten to darken the world, while the resistance to diplomatic solutions or dialogue has increased.

Nonetheless, over the past year we have witnessed some encouraging and historic moments that give us hope.

For instance, a few months ago in Paris, the nations of the world came together to commit to the most ambitious collective goals yet on climate change, and to finally begin to meaningfully address the threat that it poses to all of humanity.

Last year, intense diplomatic efforts also led to an agreement that deals with the core issues surrounding Iran's nuclear program, avoiding a major international crisis with potentially catastrophic consequences.

In our hemisphere, the recent rapprochement between the United States and Cuba filled the entire continent with hope: who couldn't be optimistic at the images of these two nations reopening their embassies and raising their flags on each other's territory after so many decades of confrontation?

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President Santos at the World Economic Forum in Davos

These examples show that determined leadership, collective action, dialogue, and diplomacy are very much alive as powerful tools of transformation. They are still the most effective paths to achieving what sometimes seems too difficult, or even impossible.

This year the world will witness another historic moment: the end of the last conflict in the Western Hemisphere.

Peace in Colombia is finally in sight. After several years of very tough negotiations in Havana, Cuba, the Government of Colombia and the Revolutionary

Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrilla group announced an agreement on the key issue of how to respect the rights of victims—including the right to justice, the most complex and difficult point in any peace negotiation. Besides reaching agreement on this and all other points on the agenda, both parties also agreed to a deadline for signing the final agreement: March 23rd, 2016.

In addition, it was agreed that disarmament would begin a maximum of 60 days after the signing of the final agreement. Clearly, there are still difficult issues ahead, such as determining where to concentrate FARC members or how

to go about disarmament. But I can state with a high degree of confidence that we have passed the tipping point in the negotiations.

There are more than 20 active conflicts around the world, and this is one of the only ones where a realistic effort is underway to bring it to an end through dialogue. We have learned that a military solution in the case of Colombia, as is the case in many other conflicts, is not the answer.

Yes, we first had to send our soldiers into battle to recover security for our citizens, and so we could negotiate from a strong position. This was a major prerequisite that eventually enabled the peace negotiations. We were in “a battle for peace,” as Yitzhak Rabin said in a memorable speech at the signing of Israel’s peace with Jordan. Rabin also taught us that sometimes a leader needs to fight terrorism as if there was no peace process, and persist in the search for peace as if there was no terrorism. This is precisely the path I chose to pursue in Colombia, however contradictory and costly it may have seemed. I have no regrets. The results speak for themselves.

Trapped since the 1960s in an armed conflict with guerrillas that used brutal tactics, and with paramilitaries and drug lords who turned the country’s rural areas into territories of crime and atroci-

ties, Colombia projected the image of a failed and violent state for decades.

Fortunately, this is no more—even though the Colombian paradox is that violence and drug trafficking have coexisted within the oldest working democracy in Latin America.

We were stuck in a war logic for too long. For this reason, as peace nears, one of our messages to the world is that it is time to recognize that war, as a major deciding mechanism in many conflicts, has simply become obsolete.

“**V**ictory” no longer brings peace, simply because in the asymmetric wars of today, victory will always be an elusive affair, and there will always be a war after the war. It would be, of course, dangerously naive to believe that the exercise of power and the capacity to intimidate are unnecessary. On the contrary, in Colombia we had to change the correlation of military capabilities in our favor as a condition to start the peace process. If our capacity to reduce the military capabilities of the FARC had not been developed and positive results had not been obtained, certainly they would not be present at the negotiating table.

The capacity of the superior power to coerce the weaker side into an imposed settlement is practically impossible today, and particularly in the Colombian context.

Another condition for successful conflict resolution in today's interdependent world is the role that global or regional circumstances can play. This has been patently obvious in the Colombian case, and we are seeing it right now in the UN's efforts to end the civil war in Syria.

A radical change in our foreign policy, which led to an improvement in our relations with our neighbors and the rest of the region, facilitated the beginning of the process. Various countries—including Venezuela, Cuba, Norway, Chile, and the United States, among others—have played major constructive roles, and the Colombian people are grateful for their good will. Today there is not a single country that doesn't support the Colombian peace process.

A further reason for this level of international support is that this will be one of the first peace processes to be concluded under the Rome Statute, serving as a model for the rest of the world.

There are several aspects that are worth considering.

First, it puts victims' rights at the heart of process. Second, there will be no impunity: a special Peace Tribunal focusing primarily on crimes against humanity will be set up. It will work

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in the following way: those who acknowledge their crimes early and tell the whole truth will receive between five and eight years under special conditions, with effective restriction of liberty, and also allowing for reparation and restoration duties. Those who acknowledge their crimes late will receive between five and eight years under ordinary conditions, which means regular jail or prison. Finally, those who do not acknowledge their crimes and are found guilty by the Peace Tribunal will get up to 20 years in regular jail or prison.

This approach—which has received near unanimous support from the international community—ensures that justice, truth, reparations, and non-repetition are achieved. And, of course, it is consistent with international law.

But these are not the only reasons why this process is unique or why it has been drawing international attention. For instance, one of the first points negotiated on the agenda addressed one of the root causes of the conflict: the severe lack of rural and agricultural development in Colombia.

We will be investing billions of dollars in programs that provide small farmers and their families with land, housing, education, technical assistance, and financing, while at the same

time connecting them with distribution chains for their products, working alongside private sector partners. This means we will be building a sustainable future that connects to a larger vision for Colombia and Latin America: to become a breadbasket to a world that will need more and more food to feed growing populations.

Another interesting point in the agreement is that it dismantles major components of the drug trafficking business. This was a condition that I demanded be included in the negotiations from the beginning.

Recently, my administration launched a highly focused, high-impact, environmentally-conscious strategy that addresses the problem of illicit crops by targeting multiple fronts simultaneously—not just by going after the mafias, but also by providing economic and social opportunities to farmers, guaranteeing a Colombian state presence and rule of law in neglected areas, and treating consumption as a public health problem.

Colombia has the moral authority to be bold in this matter.

This is also why we have played a constructive role in moving the

global conversation forward. There is now a general consensus that the so-called War on Drugs—so costly in terms of blood and money—must be re-framed, and a recent study by the Organization of American States sheds light in this direction.

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But even all of these elements taken together do not guarantee that there will be peace in Colombia. We have been conscious for a long time that peace requires a collective

cultural transformation, a new mindset, and a new way of doing things.

And for us, acting differently means not only breaking from our own past, but also moving away from the ideological battles that have drained Latin America for so long. We have developed innovative policies and programs that are changing my country in interesting ways, effectively addressing issues of poverty, inequality, and climate change, while at the same time unleashing a tremendous amount of private sector activity and opportunity.

Just five short years ago, Colombia was one of the most unequal societies in the Western Hemisphere, second only to Haiti. Like many countries, our income distribution looked like a pyramid: a large base of the very poor, and a pinnacle with relatively few wealthy.

Today, Colombia is the country that has moved more people out of poverty and extreme poverty in Latin America. And we have done it without populism, within the rules of solid democratic institutions, and by promoting the best aspects of a market economy: entrepreneurship and ingenuity.

Colombia doesn't look like a pyramid anymore. Official figures now show that for the first time in our history, Colombia has more people in its middle class than there are poor. In other words, Colombia is now shaped like a hexagon.

This was made possible because of our belief that economic growth without reducing inequality is an unsustainable path for any modern nation; but also because we believe it is good business to have an expanding middle class with more access to education, technology, and more sophisticated goods and services.

Of course, we give people direct assistance when they need it: free and subsidized housing, and free and subsidized healthcare. We also give free full scholarships to our brightest chil-

dren so they can go to the best university of their choice—public or private. But we also go beyond the obvious. For instance, we created what we call *Red Unidos* (United Network), a social army of coaches assigned to individual families to work on multiple, specific poverty indicators until they “graduate” out of poverty in a sustainable way.

And “sustainable” means creating opportunities. For example, SENA, our national technical school system, works shoulder-to-shoulder with the private sector to train over one million Colombians for jobs that are needed or are in demand in our expanding economy.

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Opportunity also means the democratization of technology. For this reason, we connected our entire country—all 1,102 municipalities—to broadband internet and gave away hundreds of thousands of free computers and tablets to children and young people in every town. Now that this massive infrastructure is in place, we are embarking on a mission so that Colombia becomes the top developer in the world of applications for the bottom of the pyramid.

We embrace self-reliance as a positive value; we have developed massive entrepreneurship promotion programs—including seed funds for the poorest in both urban and rural areas—that are slowly but surely transforming Colombia.

At the same time, we have launched a bold strategy that will support major business opportunities over the next decades. Through Bancoldex, our national business development bank, we will mobilize over \$40 billion over the next 10 years to boost growth in start-ups, scale-ups, large- and medium-sized companies, Multilatinas, and foreign companies that choose to invest in Colombia. We call this initiative the Colombia Venture Nation, and it is a reflection of Colombia's new-found confidence as one of the world's top destinations for doing business.

Building peace also means playing a more active role in international institutions and global trade. As such, Colombia—along with Mexico, Peru and Chile—is one of the founding members of the Pacific Alliance. It is the world's newest trade bloc; it has drawn the attention of 42 observer countries not only because of its size—

200 million people and \$2 trillion in combined GDP, equivalent to the eighth biggest economy in the world—but also because of its flexible structure and pro-market oriented policies that encourage the free movement of capital, goods, services, and people.

Colombia is also on fast-track admission to the OECD and we hope to gain admission to APEC this year—if the moratorium on new members is lifted.

Finally, we understand that we are called upon to exercise leadership on key global issues. On climate change, conservation of pristine forests, the use of biodiversity, and water and food security, we have

stepped forward by creating longterm programs that guarantee the sustainability and strategic use of our natural resources while also cooperating with other nations.

In order to mobilize our citizens around the narrative of a new Colombia, I have encouraged our government ministries and agencies to set and communicate ambitious and inspirational ten-year goals that go beyond my administration—or even the next one. Therefore, in our national development plans, we are now aiming to become the

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In the end, Colombia is demonstrating that responsible leadership in today's world is about being pragmatic, being able to combine ideas from the left and the right, in order to help create prosperity for citizens as the foundation of a peaceful society.

I believe in the Third Way, that practical vision on how to lead a country,

which was first promoted by former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair and subsequently been put into practice successfully by other leaders around the world, including Felipe González in Spain, Bill Clinton in the United States, Fernando Henrique Cardoso in Brazil, and Ricardo Lagos in Chile. The results confirm the effectiveness of this politically pragmatic approach.

Peace, social equality, and sustainable development are attainable when you put together, in a sensible manner, the dreams and the means to achieve them. ●

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