

**REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF COLOMBIA, JUAN
MANUEL SANTOS, AT THE UNITED NATIONS UNIVERSITY**

**"THE SUCCESSFUL PATH TOWARDS DEMOCRATIC
PROSPERITY: LESSONS FROM COLOMBIA"**

Tokyo, September 12, 2011

Thank you very much for your kind words, Mr. Vice Rector Kazuhiko Takeuchi.

I am honored to speak today before such a select audience at the United Nations University, undoubtedly the most important academic institution of the planet's largest multilateral organization.

Today I want to tell you the recent history of my country, Colombia; how we are overcoming severe security problems and how we are moving towards a new goal that we call "Democratic Prosperity."

As you may recall, a little over a decade ago our country was sadly recognized as a nation that – despite its immense potential – was fighting both a violent guerrilla force and a powerful drug-trafficking mafia.

Sometimes it seemed – according to some analysts – that we were bound to be part of the tragic category of failed states.

However, we never doubted our democracy, our institutions, and the ability of Colombians to overcome difficult times.

Under the leadership of my predecessor, President Alvaro Uribe, Colombia decided to put a stop to the violence and developed the Policy of Democratic Security – democratic for two reasons: because it is for ALL Colombians, and because it is based on respect for the rule of law and human rights.

Thanks to this policy, we made fundamental advances in the matters of security, which is a necessary condition for progress.

Not only did we reduce the guerrillas in number and cornered in the remote depths of the jungle – where we are still fighting them – but tens of thousands of members of illegal self-defense groups were demobilized and are re-entering civilian life.

I was privileged to be part of this effort, as Defense Minister, between 2006 and 2009.

And I repeat: it was an effort guided by a fundamental respect to Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law.

It is my profound conviction that the battle against terrorism and violence in all its forms can only be won if fought with the weapons given to us by the law, without using the same methods as those we are fighting.

The only success worth having is one that is achieved without sacrificing the legitimacy of the armed forces and the State.

Thanks to improved security, today Colombia – without neglecting the security front and the war on drugs – can afford to look to the future with optimism and set itself new goals.

In my campaign I proposed to the Colombian people that we advance from Democratic Security – which we have not neglected – towards a new horizon that I called Democratic Prosperity.

Thanks to the improvements in security, Colombia can now, finally, afford to broaden its agenda and participate in global debates.

And what do I refer to as Democratic Prosperity?

The achievement of economic, social and security goals to ensure a better quality of life for all Colombians, especially for the poorest and most vulnerable.

And we have ample resource to do it.

In our National Development Plan – which was approved by Congress this year – we synthesized our Democratic Prosperity Policy in three pillars: more security, more jobs and less poverty.

Every government program, every ministry or public establishment, is geared, in some way, to meeting one of these objectives.

And even before I was elected, I proposed a formula to achieve these, to agree on the fundamentals, which I called 'National Unity'.

The National Unity was not an electoral coalition – as in some democracies where different parties group together to fight elections – but a governing coalition, to ensure the governability that would allow us to push forward the reforms and initiatives the country needs most.

Thanks to the National Unity, in just over a year of government, we have achieved important and unprecedented results – some of them historic – which could not have been obtained in an atmosphere of polarization and discord.

What does the National Unity that we have put into motion imply?

It implies, in the first place, that the three branches of government – Executive, Legislative and Judicial – work, as set out by theorists in democracy since the eighteenth century, in harmony, respecting each other but also with autonomy and independence.

During the campaign I often quoted Franklin Delano Roosevelt when he said that democracy is like a plow.

According to Roosevelt, the plow of democracy is pulled by three oxen – which are the three branches – but it can only advance if the three oxen are of similar size and if they move in the same direction. Otherwise, it stagnates.

I am convinced that every democracy needs an effective executive, a strong and deliberative Congress, and an independent and effective judiciary.

The National Unity has resulted in a substantial agreement among the country's main parties – the party I belong to, and four more – to jointly push forward the major initiatives the country needs.

We do not agree on everything, nor are we trying to impose a dangerous "unanimity". No.

We have to seek consensus, to be generous in adopting the initiatives of others, to discuss the country's priorities openly and constructively to move towards a solution.

There are issues where this cannot be achieved – or may not even be desirable – but there are others in which the good of the nation requires working together.

And we have succeeded!

Within the National Unity we can find the center-right, the center, and the center-left, but no extremes, no fundamentalism.

What unites us is our commitment to our country and our faith in democracy and its institutions.

With the National Unity, in the first year of my administration, we had a historic legislature which passed laws and reforms that will change the face of the country.

Let me give you some examples:

A Victims' and Land Restitution Law that will allow us to repay a moral debt that we have had for many years with the hundreds of thousands of victims of violence in our country.

This is very important. For the first time in history a country that has not yet overcome an internal conflict will begin to repair its victims with all the instruments and resources of the State.

The day we signed the bill into law, we were joined by Ban Ki-moon, Secretary General of the United Nations, who stressed its importance and offered the support of the United Nations for its proper implementation.

Also approved by Congress, thanks to the National Unity, was an amendment to the system of oil and mining royalties that will enable us to

distribute these resources with greater equality between regions, and among the population.

Moreover, it passed a Law for Territorial Planning which allows for the creation of regions and provinces for large regional works, a bill that had failed to pass Congress 19 times.

And we approved – among many other initiatives – a constitutional amendment that establishes the principle of Fiscal Sustainability in the Constitution; and a Fiscal Rule that will ensure a prudent management of the State's finances. This is considered the state of the art worldwide.

All of the above-mentioned reforms were necessary but in the past conflicting interests would block them, and we were able to move ahead thanks to the governability afforded to us by the National Unity.

When we see other countries in the world, where the best or most important initiatives are blocked out by partisan conflict, we understand the importance of what we have achieved in Colombia.

Of course, and I want to emphasize this, the National Unity also implies a profound respect for the opposition.

The voice of those who do not share the government's ideas is always necessary in a democracy; it is often the cold shower that keeps us awake and alerts us not to succumb to conformity.

We are therefore committed to protecting and respecting the opposing voices which – though not many – are always important.

Today, Colombia, in an atmosphere of optimism – as essential to countries as the sun is to plants –, is seeing many of its economic and social indicators improve.

In the case of employment, for example, which is crucial to reducing poverty, we have been advancing, month after month, towards our goal of reducing the unemployment rate to less than 10%.

Between August of last year and July of this year we have created over 700,000 jobs, with a very special characteristic: most of them are in the formal sector, and enjoy all the benefits of the law.

Colombia received – twelve years after having lost it – the investment grade credit rating by the three major rating agencies in the world, and today our bonds are sought after by international investors, even at better prices than those of some countries of the G-8.

Exports and foreign investment in our country are growing significantly – the highest in Latin America – because every day there is more confidence in the reliability and stability of our economy.

In the first quarter of this year our GDP grew by over 5 percent and all forecasts indicate that this growth will continue for the rest of the year.

We have made significant advances in the field of education, approaching universal access to primary and basic education, and now we are focused on the essential task of improving the quality of our schools.

We still have unacceptable levels of poverty and we are aware that their reduction should be our main objective.

We have designed a comprehensive program to care for the population now living in extreme poverty, which exceeds 15 percent of the total population, and we are committed to reducing that percentage below 10 percent.

On the issue of housing, we set out to build a million homes, especially low-income housing for the poorest, in the four years of this government, and today we see with joy that we are on track to meet that goal.

In other words, on the basis of improved security and stable economic policy, and in a political environment of extraordinary governability, we are moving forward in the economic and social priorities of the country.

All my life I have been a promoter of the concept of Good Government, which involves the application of the principles of transparency, efficiency, effectiveness and accountability.

Today I have the opportunity of applying these principles from the Presidency, and we have begun a campaign against corruption and red tape – to ensure transparency in all dealings with the State – which is beginning to yield results.

Colombia is now one of the few countries – perhaps the only one – where any citizen or organization can consult, review or monitor every single State spending transaction through a public website, in real time!

Thanks to a system devised in our first year in office, now Colombians or anyone in the world can know how resources are spent in the different government departments, to whom the payments are made, and how fast the contracts are being executed.

This is a revolutionary exercise in transparency which demonstrates our commitment to the policies of Good Governance.

Along the same lines, we have set out the goal of joining the OECD, which – more than an organization of rich countries – is an organization of countries that design and implement sound economic policy.

For Colombia – in this new era we are living in – wants to play the role it deserves in the international community.

Today our country is part of the Security Council of the United Nations, having been elected for the period 2011-2012 with one of the highest number of votes in the history of the organization.

From the Council we have led a review of the assistance that has been going to Haiti, a Caribbean country devastated by natural and social calamities, which needs all the solidarity of the international community.

Today we have good relations with our neighbors and all the countries of the region; we have improved our trade; and given security advice and assistance to several countries in Central and South America.

And very importantly, we have expanded our agenda – which was previously focused almost exclusively on the fight against violence and drug trafficking – to matters of infrastructure, environmental protection,

technology, innovation, and cooperation for development, among other issues.

In addition, we have consolidated with Mexico, Peru and Chile an Alliance for Deep Integration, also known as the Pacific Partnership, to venture with greater strength into the Asian markets.

And we actively participate in processes of regional integration such as the Union of South American Nations UNASUR – whose Secretary General is Colombian –, the Andean Community, the Association of Caribbean States and the Mechanism for Dialogue in Mesoamerica.

Next year we will also host the Summit of the Americas, bringing together the heads of state of all the countries in the Americas to discuss pressing issues such as combating inequality and poverty, responding to natural disasters, reducing insecurity, increasing access to technologies, and accelerating the physical integration and interconnection of the continent.

Next week, on the other hand, I will have the opportunity to address the General Assembly of the United Nations in New York, whose President has proposed peaceful mediation in the settlement of disputes as a central theme for the meeting.

From Colombia, we can say with satisfaction that we have been glad to help in the search for dialogue, negotiation and mediation in our region.

We facilitated, with Venezuela, the return of Honduras to the Organization of American States, which, as Secretary Ban Ki-moon said during his recent visit, raised the country's international profile and expanded our diplomatic horizon.

Colombia is a nation convinced of the importance of dialogue and consultation, and we will do what we can to promote these tools for conflict resolution.

We have said, with several regional leaders such as the president of the Inter-American Development Bank and the President of Chile, that this could be, if we work hard enough, the Decade of Latin America.

Today, in a context of global uncertainty, Latin America can point to a political stability based on democracy, with no conflicts between its nations, and an economic strength that has withstood various financial crises.

We also have an abundance of what the world needs most today: water, energy, food, forests and a rapidly growing, young and enthusiastic workforce.

So the momentum of Colombia cannot be understood as an isolated phenomenon, but must be understood within the regional context of a Latin America which presents great opportunities.

In conclusion, and before answering some questions from the audience, we can say that Colombia is making progress not only in internal matters of security, governance, economic progress and social inclusion, but has become, increasingly, a positive and proactive force in the international arena.

That is the journey we are undergoing, and those are the lessons we can share with the world.

Seneca said that if one does not know to which port one is sailing, no wind is favorable.

Fortunately, this is not our case.

In Colombia we have chosen a port of destination – Democratic Prosperity – and we're working hard to reach it.

Thank you very much.