

Statement of Joseph E. Macmanus
Ambassador Nominee to the Republic of Colombia
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
March 7, 2018

Mr. Chairman and distinguished Members of the committee, I come before you today, both honored and humbled, to be considered to represent the United States as the President's nominee for U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Colombia. I feel honored by the prospect of serving our country in this role and, if confirmed, I am committed to representing the President, the American people, and their national interests in a country so key to our security and prosperity in the Western Hemisphere.

I would like to thank my wife and son, for supporting my 32-year career in the Foreign Service. Without your continued support I would not be here today.

Mr. Chairman, as the Members of this body know, our relationship with Colombia represents for both of our countries the full scope of opportunities and challenges that face our hemisphere and the world.

In spite of a well-known history of violence and instability, Colombia has transformed itself over the last two decades into a sturdy democracy of growing and maturing institutions with a dynamic market economy and a society brimming with optimism and hope for the future. Violent capital crime has decreased dramatically and the peace accord offers a way forward after one of the world's longest running civil wars. Colombia has chosen a new path.

In these respects, the United States has no more capable and disposed partner in the region than Colombia, and Colombia has no more reliable and steady partner than the United States. This partnership has flourished under Plan Colombia, which has provided a platform for our support and cooperation to evolve as Colombia has matured. The support of the U.S. Congress remains vital to the health and momentum of this relationship.

At the heart of this cooperation is an urgent bilateral challenge, but this should not detract from the many positive aspects and values of our relationship. Colombia remains the single largest cultivator of coca in the world, the single largest producer of cocaine in the world, and the single largest trafficker of cocaine into the United States. By U.S. estimates, over 90 percent of cocaine brought to the United States originates in Colombia.

In my brief remarks this afternoon, I want to address the strategic purpose of U.S. continued support for Colombia, the means by which we can advocate our interests, and address the question of how to cap the growth of coca cultivation and return to

the progress of previous years when there was diminishing production and trafficking of cocaine.

The United States, including both the Administration and the Congress, has stated plainly its deep concern about the surge in coca cultivation and cocaine production. It is a topic of continuing discussion with and within the Colombian government. Our commitment over the past two decades to work side-by-side with Colombia to address the issue has produced encouraging results. Over this period, with a combination of training, tools, and technical skills provided through U.S. assistance, the Colombian security forces have made serious and increasingly effective efforts to address narcotics trafficking and transnational organized criminals and their networks.

In the past 12 months in bilateral meetings here in Washington and in high-level visits to Colombia, President Trump, Vice President Pence, Secretary of State Tillerson, and numerous other government officials have impressed on the Colombian government the urgency with which they must do more to combat the tremendous growth in coca cultivation. The Colombians in turn have developed a wide range of new policies and programs to address the issue, and they continue to take losses in their security forces on a weekly basis fighting drug traffickers and their networks. Colombia is fully engaged in this fight.

Coca cultivation presents challenges to Colombia across every aspect of its governance and society. It damages families and communities through dangerous arrangements with traffickers, transnational criminal organizations, and guerrillas, resulting in killings, displacements, and corruption of individuals and government officials. It threatens public health and the environment, especially in the production phases of cocaine. It subverts licit economic development through the illusion of illicit cultivation as a realistic plan for subsistence or profit. It creates illegal money flows throughout the region, further leading to corruption and stunting the ability of the criminal justice system to function untainted with devastating effects throughout the illicit supply chain to the United States.

Such a pervasive set of threats requires an integrated, whole-of-government approach to counternarcotics and rural development in the strategic areas of concern. This approach characterizes the implementation of the peace accord related to illicit drugs, rural reform, and justice for victims.

The United States is supporting the Colombian government's efforts across Colombia, in Tumaco, in Antioquia, and elsewhere. Working with national, state and municipal governments, the private sector, civil society, and public forces, the Colombian government is beginning to bring security and economic opportunities to areas of the country previously under-served and unsafe. Ending the scourge of narcotics trafficking that has destroyed so many Colombian and American families

is an imperative for our relationship, for Colombia's future, and for the success of the peace accord's implementation. In the recently concluded U.S.-Colombia High Level Dialogue, Colombia committed to reducing Colombia's cocaine production and cultivation to 50 percent of current levels by 2023.

If confirmed, I will be a strong and active supporter of this goal. Over the past five years, U.S. efforts in four of the top coca producing regions of the country have supported more than 35,000 families while leveraging more than \$265 million in public and private resources. In FY16, USAID programs directly supported over 1,800 small businesses and 14,000 small-scale farmers of coffee, cacao, milk, and honey through 45 producer associations and groups creating licit economies and jobs in the rural sector.

U.S. efforts to boost licit economic opportunities, develop and improve key infrastructure, and confront criminal activities, including narcotics production and related criminal activities, marks the next chapter in this fight. The United States and Colombia, working side by side, can assist communities affected by decades of conflict and narcotics trafficking through the implementation of the peace accord.

But our relationship with Colombia is not just about drugs. Colombia is also an important trade partner for the United States, underscored by the U.S.-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement (CTPA) that has supported economic growth and employment opportunities in both countries. Colombia is America's 25th largest trading partner, with two-way trade in 2017 amounting to \$26.82 billion. It is notably one of the most balanced trading relationships in the world, with only a \$282 million trade deficit for the United States, something I will work on if confirmed.

We support Colombia's accession to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) once it completes all the technical requirements for entry. In support of this we are providing Colombia with \$2 million in assistance to improve labor practices and encouraging Colombia to meet its U.S.-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement obligation to protect intellectual property rights, which will also deter transnational criminal organizations.

The United States also wants to see full implementation of new regulations to ensure market access for U.S. companies and full compliance with the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement and Labor Action Plan.

The educational ties between our countries also continue to grow. With substantial government investment from the United States and Colombia, together with private sector collaboration, our joint innovation fund has awarded nearly 30 grants in the last three years to teams of Colombian and U.S. academic institutions to build institutional capacity and create new exchange and training programs.

We encourage collaboration to support language and teacher training that strengthen educational and economic opportunities. Access to quality education is key to promoting racial and ethnic equality. Empowering persons of African and indigenous descent, women, and other underrepresented communities through education strengthens society as a whole and promotes economic opportunities for all.

We have had excellent cooperation with the Government of Colombia through the U.S.-Colombia Action Plan on Racial and Ethnic Equality to improve access to education, entrepreneurship, and employment opportunities for Afro-Colombians and indigenous communities and explore ways to promote inclusive policies and programs for both countries.

Exchange programs between the United States and Colombia are uniquely able to reach young people and create new economic opportunities in both countries and these will continue.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I will say a few words about myself. I am a senior member of the U.S. Foreign Service, having served over 30 years at home and abroad. My experience includes work in Latin America and Europe. I served as our ambassador to the International Atomic Energy Agency and for many years worked closely as a senior aide to four Secretaries of State. I have a detailed knowledge of the importance of the Department of State's relationship with Congress and I respect and value the views of its Members and the nature of their oversight. I am committed to and, if confirmed, will maintain strong ties with the Members of this Committee, many of whom have deep experience on these issues, productive relationships with Colombians in government and civil society, visit the country often, and offer measured and wise views on the problems Colombia faces.

Mr. Chairman, we share a common purpose. Colombia continues its struggle to create the future it has worked so diligently to achieve for nearly two decades. Many of its most serious challenges, especially the twin challenges of consolidating peace and controlling drug trafficking, are deep seated and frankly the work of a generation. But Colombians are committed to picking up the pace. And if confirmed, I am committed to continuing the fine work of my predecessors and honoring the tremendous sacrifice of Colombians in this shared struggle. If confirmed, I will support and defend our policies, our interests, and represent the President and the American people as their voice and advocate.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I look forward to responding to your questions.