

**Remarks as prepared for the Senate Foreign Relations
Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere, Transnational Crime, Civilian
Security, Democracy, Human Rights, and Global Women's Issues
"The U.S.-Colombia Partnership"**

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Chairman Rubio, Ranking Member Cardin, Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for convening this hearing.

Colombia is our highest performing and most willing partner in Latin America. Together we have built a partnership based on shared values and shared interests, and our interests there are among the most important in the entire hemisphere. This administration highly values the excellent relationship we have with President Iván Duque and his government.

Today's robust partnership with Colombia is the fruit of decades of U.S. attention to this relationship, including the bipartisan support here in the United States Congress. Your intense engagement with Colombia has been, and will remain, a critical contributor to our success.

Americans and Colombians work together to make both the United States and Colombia safer and more prosperous, while adhering to our values. We support Colombian efforts to expand cooperation on security and counternarcotics. This includes helping Colombians implement their programs to slash coca cultivation and cocaine production, as well as our robust partnership to dismantle criminal organizations. We work together to promote human rights and democracy in Colombia and to implement the 2016 peace accord, despite the recklessness of so-called FARC dissidents who have abandoned the commitments they made to the Colombian people and to the international community. We work with Colombia to expand economic opportunity and free, fair, and reciprocal trade. In short, we face common challenges together.

Our cooperation extends, and we cannot emphasize this enough, to our shared efforts to help the people of Venezuela recover and fully exercise the democratic rights enshrined in their own constitution, a constitution honored by Venezuelan interim president Juan Guaidó and trampled underfoot by Nicolás Maduro. We continue to support Colombians as they and their government have received with immense generosity the many Venezuelans displaced by the corruption, cruelty, and mismanagement of Maduro and the crisis he has generated in their homeland.

We remain Colombia's economic partner of choice, and the U.S.-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement continues to generate opportunities for economic growth and employment in both countries. Importantly, we registered a trade surplus with Colombia in 2018. U.S. companies increasingly see Colombia as a promising investment destination, and we are attracting Colombian capital to the United States.

Colombia is, in many ways, a model for the region – a strong democracy and an economic powerhouse. It aggressively confronts crime and terrorism within its borders and exports security training. Colombia is a diplomatic leader in the Americas. We intend to continue supporting the inclusive democratic institutions so crucial to advancing peace, security, and prosperity in Colombia and its neighbors.

For two decades, the Colombian government maintained sustained pressure on the FARC, a criminal and terrorist organization, and we take pride in having lent our hand to those efforts. That pressure helped bring the FARC to the negotiating table, resulting in the 2016 peace accord that ended a 52-year insurgency. The sacrifice and heroism of many in Colombia's security forces – and prosecutors and judges too – helped bring this about. Since the signing of the accord, the Colombian government has made real progress on implementation, and nearly 7,000 guerrillas have disarmed. The Colombian congress passed important implementing legislation, three transitional justice institutions have started work to address conflict related crimes and abuses, and two United Nations political missions have deployed to verify FARC disarmament, reincorporation, and security guarantees. On September 12, the United States and other UN Security Council members voted to extend the current UN Verification Mission mandate for another year, as requested by President Duque. The council's unanimous approval signals the international community's continued strong support for peace in Colombia.

Violence continues, but nationwide security indices have clearly improved. The Duque administration has accelerated efforts to approve individual and collective development projects that support reincorporation of ex-combatants, implemented land titling and registration programs, and enrolled approximately 95 percent of ex-combatants in healthcare.

This vastly complex peace accord – among the most intricate, multifaceted, and rigorous agreement of its kind – touches nearly every institution in Colombia, and the country is in just year three of what the negotiating parties saw as an initial 15-year timeline for implementation. Making all the pieces fit, making it all work, represents a huge challenge, and an admirable commitment to peace by the people of Colombia.

Still, the University of Notre Dame's Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies considers implementation now underway for 70 percent of the accord's provisions, a level comparable to other successful peace processes. The Department of State funds these Kroc Institute efforts to monitor implementation, resources available to us because you in Congress have appropriated them. We see this as a valuable part of our sustained effort to support Colombians as they work to establish a just and lasting peace for themselves, a way to help them identify and address implementation challenges.

Implementation does face challenges, particularly where government presence remains weak. The killing of social leaders, often in the rural communities most afflicted by crime and narco-trafficking, concern us deeply. We recognize the importance of continued engagement to help Colombia defeat the illegal armed groups seeking to fill vacuums left behind by the demobilized FARC. Helping extend security and state presence in rural areas can make these regions and those who live in them more secure and prosperous, and deny these spaces to

criminals, to narcotics traffickers. Of course, this requires a sustained commitment, and resources.

So-called FARC dissidents – FARC guerrillas who rejected the accord and retained their control of various illegal economies, notably drugs – have been a problem since the signing of the accord. More recently, a few former leaders of the FARC chose to abandon the FARC’s peace accord commitments and return to terrorism, violence, and criminality.

The most notable among them all were and all remain deeply immersed in the coca-cocaine economy. We strongly repudiate their actions, and the peace accord makes clear that those who commit serious crimes after the signing of the accord can and will be held accountable to the full extent of the law, including the possibility of extradition as appropriate. Importantly, both the Colombian government and the FARC political party have rejected this call by a small group of individuals to return to violence and crime and have reiterated their commitments to peace. Writing in the Washington Post on September 3, President Duque explained that, “Colombia stands united in the face of a small number of criminals who want to sidetrack the historic transformation that is underway.” We stand resolutely with Colombia and its efforts to secure the peace.

Colombians know that to implement the peace accord successfully they must also confront narcotics production and trafficking and help Venezuelans resolve the crisis that has cast Venezuela itself into chaos and threatens to destabilize the region.

You will hear from Assistant Secretary Madison about our efforts to strengthen counternarcotics cooperation. Our governments are pursuing a comprehensive approach, including eradication, interdiction, law enforcement cooperation, extraditions, and integrated rural development so families immersed in the coca economy can have a legal, decent way to make a living. In 2018, we agreed with Colombia to work together to cut coca cultivation and cocaine production by half by the end of 2023, and we have already seen the Duque administration follow through on this commitment. We know that they will need unity of effort across their security and civilian agencies, and our continued cooperation and support, to drive down cultivation and production, and that doing so can enhance the health and security of us all.

As for restart of aerial eradication, we recognize that Colombia itself must make that call, but we’ve seen it work in the past and we’re confident that it could work in the future. At the request of the Duque Administration, we will work with the Colombian government to restart a targeted, Colombia-led aerial eradication program as part of a broader comprehensive approach.

The political, economic, and humanitarian crisis in Venezuela and its spillover effects into the region remains a significant threat to Colombia’s economic growth and political stabilization efforts. Colombia carries the greatest burden of any of Venezuela’s neighbors as this hemisphere deals with the effects of the tyranny, the cruelty, and the incompetence of Nicolás Maduro.

He and those who support him have provoked a regional stability crisis. As we speak, more than three percent of the population of Venezuela resides in Colombia, a statistic that should – but won’t – make even Nicolás Maduro hang his head in shame. Venezuela’s porous border

with Colombia, coupled with Maduro's decision to harbor groups like FARC dissidents and the ELN in Venezuela, has generated new security challenges.

At the latest estimate, Colombia hosts over 1.4 million Venezuelan refugees and displaced Venezuelans, imposing outsized burdens on Colombian taxpayers and generating outsized demands on Colombian social services. Lay those costs at the feet of Nicolás Maduro, not at the feet of those forced to flee his tyrannical rule. Each of those individuals has a story to tell of oppression, deprivation, and suffering. Desperate and vulnerable Venezuelans are susceptible both to exploitation by criminal groups and, in some cases, to recruitment by illegal actors. We commend Colombia for its humanitarian contributions and for its generosity.

The United States has been deeply involved in the humanitarian and diplomatic effort to address the crisis. Since FY 2017, we have provided nearly \$214 million to help Colombia respond to the influx, including nearly \$175 million in humanitarian aid and more than \$37 million development and economic assistance. In addition, we have twice deployed the U.S. Navy Ship COMFORT on medical missions to the region. During stops in Colombia in November 2018 and in August, COMFORT personnel treated more than 17,000 patients.

While helping Colombia confront these challenges, we must never lose sight of the real progress it has made. Through steady economic stewardship over the past two decades, and with our assistance, Colombia has doubled the size of its economy and the number of Colombians in poverty has fallen from one-in-five to one-in-twenty-five. Our Trade Promotion Agreement underpins a strong trading relationship with two-way goods trade of \$29 billion in 2018. The United States supported Colombia's accession to the OECD, based on its significant efforts over the past five years to meet the OECD's technical standards. We look forward to formally welcoming Colombia to the OECD once it formalizes its accession.

We have a fully committed partner in the Duque administration. As President Duque told President Trump when he visited the White House in February, he and his administration are supporting efforts to secure a just and lasting peace by extending stability, legality, and opportunity in Colombia's conflict-affected regions, aggressively increasing counternarcotics efforts and confronting the threat of a destabilized Venezuela.

Our FY 2020 funding request for Colombia reflects the Administration's focus on advancing these priorities. Building on effective prior-year programs, bilateral U.S. assistance will focus on:

- Security, including counternarcotics and reintegration of ex-combatants;
- Expansion of state presence in conflict-affected areas; and
- Justice and support to the Colombian government for victims.

Chairman Rubio, Ranking Member Cardin, Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to meet with you today to discuss our relationship with Colombia.

We all know that congressional support has been instrumental in the successes of the past twenty years, and we know that it remains the foundation of our successful partnership with the people and the democratic institutions of Colombia. I look forward to your questions.