

Statement by P. Michael McKinley
Ambassador-designate to the Republic of Colombia
before the
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
June 29, 2010

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

I am honored to appear before you today as the President's nominee to serve as the next United States Ambassador to the Republic of Colombia. I want to thank President Obama and Secretary Clinton for the confidence they have placed in me.

For nearly three years now, it has been my privilege to represent our nation in Peru, where we have a rich bilateral agenda promoting development, consolidating democracy, protecting the environment, improving the market for U.S. exports, and confronting the transnational threats to our national security. If confirmed to represent our country in Colombia, I will bring my wider experience to bear, serving with the many fine men and women who work every day to advance U.S. interests.

Americans can be proud of our bipartisan support to Colombia over the last decade. The people of Colombia have made enormous sacrifices in confronting the major challenges they faced, and the contributions of the United States have been pivotal in helping reverse the problems faced a decade ago. As Secretary Clinton reaffirmed in Bogota just a few weeks

ago, “the United States has been proud to stand with Colombia, and we will continue to stand with [Colombia] in the future.” This most recent partnership is a capstone to two-hundred years of friendship.

If I am confirmed, our mission’s priorities would be to build on the successes of recent years: enhancing the safety of all our citizens, consolidating counternarcotics gains, strengthening human rights and rule of law, and extending social inclusion and economic development to more of Colombia’s displaced and disadvantaged.

We can also expect Colombia to have a growing regional and international role, as we have already seen in its training of Mexican and other Latin American law enforcement and justice sectors; in its contributions to Haiti after the devastating earthquake; in its constructive positions in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change negotiations; and in its leadership in the Energy and Climate Partnership of the Americas (ECPA) and the Pathways to Prosperity Initiative.

More specifically, my highest objectives, should I be confirmed, would include:

-- First, the safety of the approximately 61,000 U.S. citizens residing in Colombia and the estimated 100,000 U.S. citizen tourists who visit annually.

We will also continue to protect U.S. borders and ensure our security at

home, while promoting travel to the United States for business, tourism, and education.

-- Second, the extension of democratic principles, sound governance, and basic social services. We will be unwavering in our advocacy for strengthened rule of law and respect for human, civil, and labor rights throughout Colombia, especially for Afro-Colombian and indigenous groups, Colombia's most vulnerable communities. I would include programs to provide assistance to Colombia's large population of internally displaced persons.

-- Third, guarding American economic interests and investments in Colombia. Under the President's National Export Initiative (NEI), we will focus greater attention on trade advocacy, access to credit, and trade barriers. A healthy Colombian market will not only mean more American jobs, but will ensure economic development in Colombia, bring greater national stability, and contribute to the government's ability to fund services and security for its people.

-- Fourth, continue to stem the production and trafficking of illegal drugs to the United States, in close collaboration with the new Colombian government, set to take office on August 7. Thanks in part to our support, Colombia has had success disrupting the drug trade, strengthening the

capacity of Colombia's judicial and law enforcement institutions, and encouraging alternative development. Nonetheless, we must continue to deploy a variety of tools to mitigate the impact this criminal activity has in the United States and Colombia. As we maintain a close partnership in these issues, we also intend to continue the transfer of responsibilities for several of these programs to the Colombian government.

-- Lastly, supporting the Colombian government's multi-faceted efforts to address the transnational threat from illegal armed groups. As Secretary Clinton said on June 9 in Bogota: "the security threats have not completely been eliminated and, therefore, the United States will continue to support the Colombian people, the Colombian military, and their government in the ongoing struggle against the insurgents, the guerillas, the narco-traffickers, who would wish to turn the clock back."

If confirmed, I pledge to work closely with members of this Committee, and with your colleagues in Congress, to achieve these strategic objectives in Colombia.

Thank you again for giving me the honor of appearing before you today. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.