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UNTIL RELEASED BY THE HOUSE GOVERNMENT REFORM COMMITTEE

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF  
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Mr. Chairman, Representative Waxman, and distinguished Members of the Committee, it is a pleasure to appear before you today to discuss the United States Southern Command's role in assisting Colombia with its battle against narcoterrorism. Every day your soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, Coast Guardsmen, and civilians at Southern Command are working hard and employing their skills to accomplish our missions in this vital endeavor. We are shoring up our own national security by addressing this challenge at this time and in this place. Simultaneously we are laying the groundwork to promote and maintain future security and stability.

Colombia is at a decisive point in their fight. I have been to Colombia twenty six times over the last 22 months, and I am seeing significant progress. I continue to be optimistic that President Uribe and his administration will establish security and stability in that country. Much of my optimism stems from what I've personally seen him do since he became President. He is inculcating his government and his armed forces with an aggressive spirit and belief they can win the war against the narcoterrorists and end the violence. But the momentum he has built and the progress Colombia has shown is reversible. Consequently, we must maintain our steady, patient support in order to reinforce the successes we have seen and to guarantee a tangible return on the significant investment our country has made to our democratic neighbor.

To outline United States Southern Command's efforts in this endeavor, I will discuss the status of Southern Command's support of Plan Colombia, the progress we are seeing in Colombia, and the way ahead. Assisting Colombia in their fight continues to be in our own best interest. A secure Colombia will benefit fully from democratic processes and economic growth, prevent narcoterrorist spillover, and serve as a regional example.

Conversely, a failed Colombia, serving as a safe haven for narcoterrorists and international terrorists, would be a most unwelcome regional model. While this is primarily Colombia's fight to win, we have the opportunity to tip the balance by augmenting their efforts decisively with our unwavering support.

### **U.S. Southern Command's Support to Plan Colombia**

Plan Colombia is a six-year plan designed to defeat the threat the Colombians face. This threat continues to come from the three largest illegal armed groups in Colombia, all named on the State Department's list of foreign terrorist organizations and two named on the President's list of drug kingpins: the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia or FARC, the National Liberation Army or ELN, and the United Self-Defense Forces or AUC. While these groups may retain fragments of their founding philosophies, they appear to have jettisoned ideology in favor of terrorist methods and narco-trafficking.

Narcoterrorism and its connection to the drug industry threaten the stability of several nations in Latin America and the Caribbean and erode the very fabric of democracy by spawning terrorism, corrupting public institutions, promoting criminal activity, undermining legitimate economies, and disrupting social order. The violence and corruption not only threatens our neighbors, it poses a direct national security threat to our homeland. The latest Center for Disease Control statistics indicate that over 21,000 Americans die each year as a direct result of drug related causes. This staggering number does not take into account the second and third order effects on families, the lost productivity of those lives cut short, or the additional thousands of Americans we lose to indirect drug related causes. Illicit drug abuse is certainly a multi-faceted problem, but

our support to Plan Colombia is effectively addressing one of its most critical components.

Our role at Southern Command is to support implementation of the military aspects of the plan. The plan addresses the entire depth of Colombia's complex problem, however, and is by no means envisioned as a simple military solution. As you know, various other U.S. government agencies and departments received funding to support both military and non-military aspects of Plan Colombia.

Colombia is in its fourth year of this six-year plan. The first phase of three focused on the Putumayo and Caquetá Departments of Southern Colombia where approximately half of Colombia's coca cultivation took place and lasted from December 2000 until December 2002. Southern Command was responsible primarily for training and equipping a Counter Narcotics Brigade, fielding Blackhawk and Huey II helicopters and also training pilots and crews during the first phase. Secondary efforts provided for infrastructure upgrades, riverine training, and counterdrug intelligence support. In Phase II, the Colombians are expanding the size of the armed forces, working with neighboring countries for combined operations, building forests where coca once grew, and creating units comprised of campesino soldiers to help guard towns where government presence was formerly lacking. Additionally, the government has mounted an extensive campaign plan to regain control over territory and establish governance in areas controlled by the narcoterrorists for decades. These initiatives support continued drug eradication and interdiction, to include Colombia's Air Bridge Denial Program. Since resumption of air bridge denial operations in August 2003, the Colombian Air Force has destroyed 16 aircraft, arrested one Colombian pilot and stopped eight metric tons of cocaine from

reaching U.S. streets. Phase III of Plan Colombia culminates the entire plan by expanding the government presence and control nationwide. While it is still too early to predict the exact end state of Plan Colombia, the progress we are seeing is a positive development that promises to complete that plan and institutionalize its successes.

### **Counter Narcotics Brigade**

The Counter Narcotics Brigade (CN Brigade) headquarters and its three battalions are the best-trained and equipped conventional units in the Colombian Army. U.S. military personnel conducted staff and light infantry training for almost 2,300 troops. In accordance with Plan Colombia, the CN Brigade was originally designed to operate in southern Colombia. The CN brigade had impressive results during drug interdiction operations in that part of the country by destroying coca processing labs, providing security to eradication operations, and seizing chemical precursors and coca leaf. The Colombian military synchronized the deployments of the Counter Narcotics Brigade (CN Brigade) in Phase I with Colombian National Police and Department of State eradication efforts. Additionally, as narcotraffickers began pushing cocaine labs away from southern Colombian cultivation areas, the Colombian police and military have found it easier to track and disrupt their illicit actions. Because of its success in the Putumayo and Caquetá Departments, this brigade is now also being used beyond its original scope in other parts of the country, most notably the Nariño Department. We continue to provide sustainment training to the CN Brigade. In 2003, this unit transformed its organizational structure to become more flexible and deployable to plan and conduct ground, riverine, and air assault offensive operations against narcoterrorist organizations and targets throughout the entire country. Most recently, the CN Brigade captured Nayibe Rojas Valdarrama,

aka “Sonia” Chief of Finances and Logistics for the FARC Southern Bloc. Her capture has led to numerous other related arrests and has degraded the FARC’s ability to conduct narco trafficking and launder its proceeds.

## **Helicopters**

Since December 2000, the United States has provided air mobility to the first CN Brigade using a company of 28 UH-1Ns with a combination of Colombian and Department of State contracted pilots. The UH-1N aircraft are based in Tolemaida with the Colombian Army Aviation Battalion and are forward deployed to Larandia for operations. The current operational focus remains providing air mobility support for counterdrug operations. Delivery of the 25 Plan Colombia Huey IIs was completed in September 2002. These helicopters are also based at Tolemaida and currently focused on supporting pilot training and infrastructure security. All fourteen UH-60L Blackhawk helicopters procured under Plan Colombia for the Colombian military began operations in January 2003 after a thorough program of pilot training. These helicopters also support the CN Brigade, pilot training, and infrastructure security. While the Department of State is responsible for program oversight and funding for operations and contract maintenance for all of these helicopters, quality control is provided by a U.S. Army Technical Assistance Field Team. The Department of Defense retains responsibility for training Colombian Army pilots, crew chiefs and aviation unit maintenance personnel to fly and maintain Blackhawk and Huey II helicopters. The maintenance programs are supplemented by a safety initiative that integrates risk management planning into air operations and is working towards the establishment of a Colombian Joint Safety Center,

modeled on the U.S. military's safety centers. Overall, these helicopters have given the Colombian military unprecedented mobility although they are still lacking sufficient lift assets. This mobility allows an increasingly well-trained Colombian Army to maneuver across a rugged landscape, in parts of the country they have not operated in for years, resulting in greater operational effectiveness against the narcoterrorists.

### **Engineer and Infrastructure Support**

The Plan Colombia supplemental appropriation allowed us to complete large-scale infrastructure improvements that greatly accelerated the development of increased operational capabilities for Colombia's forces. In subsequent years, we have continued to provide necessary facilities to support our training and equipping programs. Among our more significant engineer projects were the expansion of both fixed-wing and helicopter facilities at Tres Esquinas, the establishment of a comprehensive helicopter pilot training school at Melgar and Tolemaida, improved port facilities at Buenaventura, development of riverine support and maintenance facilities at Tres Esquinas and La Tagua, and the development of helicopter operational and support facilities at Larandia. We are moving now to develop the logistics infrastructure needed to support Colombian forces as they move outward to re-establish government control throughout Colombia. We recently completed and turned over a hangar that will directly improve the operational rate of the Colombian C-130 fleet by improving their maintenance program. Additionally, in September 2003, we awarded contracts to establish logistics support centers, motorpools and maintenance facilities. As a direct result of the completion of these facilities, Colombian forces will be better able to conduct and sustain forward operations.

## **Professionalism and Human Rights**

Embedded within the training Southern Command and U.S. forces provide under Plan Colombia is the institutionalization of human rights and the respect for law by the Colombian military. Our military legal assistance projects in Colombia, which include developing a Judge Advocate General (JAG) school as well as legal and human rights reform, continue on track. The initial JAG school courses began in February 2002 in temporary facilities. The permanent JAG School opened on July 29, 2003, and provides courses on military justice, international law, and operational law. We have worked closely with the Colombian military to establish and build a Military Penal Justice Corps. 320 military, police, and civilian lawyers received continued professional legal education beyond that provided at the school. The Colombian military legal corps, similar to the method used by our armed forces, is also becoming embedded with the field units of the Army in order to provide legal advice to commanders during operations.

United States Southern Command continues to support Colombian efforts to extend human rights training throughout its ranks. Colombia is fighting its illegal armed groups justly, in accordance with democratic values and human rights. This is instrumental in what we are collectively striving to achieve. The Colombian government is not resorting to rural concentration camps, peasant roundups, massacres, disappearances or other tactics used by their enemies. According to the latest Department of State Colombian Human Rights Report, the vast majority of allegations of human rights abuses, over 98 percent are attributed to Colombia's illegal armed groups, primarily the three-narcoterrorist groups, and not to government forces. This report clearly demonstrates the



institutionalization of human rights by the Colombian government, whose forces as recently as the mid-1990s were accused of 50-60 percent of human rights abuses.

The Human Rights report finds that, “the government has an extensive human rights apparatus coordinated by the office of the President's Advisor for Human Rights. That office coordinates with local human rights groups. Most notably, it established a special ‘momentum’ committee to advance judicial resolutions of 100 key human rights cases.” Over 290,000 members of Colombia’s security forces have received specialized human rights training since 1996, conducted by the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Colombian Red Cross, the Roman Catholic church, foreign governments, and other government offices and agencies. I am convinced the Colombian government is serious about human rights and will continue to promote them aggressively.

### **The Uribe Administration’s Progress**

Plan Colombia predates President Uribe by two years and will end coincidentally when he is scheduled to leave office in 2006. While he has firmly embraced the plan, he has also brought to office new initiatives and a long-term vision that extends well beyond that six-year plan. President Uribe won a landslide victory by running on a platform of aggressively hunting down the terrorists in his country and asserting government control of national territory. After years of failed attempts to negotiate with illegal armed groups, to include a bold experiment that gave the FARC a safe haven in the southern part of the country, the people of Colombia had finally had enough of terrorist groups, especially after seeing how the FARC had used their safe haven to plot terrorist acts and establish drug base camps instead of developing their notional politics into a concrete reality.

President Uribe faces enormous challenges, but he is using his mandate to put deeds behind his words. The signs of his progress, which have built upon our support to Plan Colombia, are already evident. Colombia developed a comprehensive national security strategy that directs all the tools at the government's disposal toward a common end of defeating the terrorists. The Colombians now spend more than 4 percent of their GDP on defense. President Uribe has levied a war tax on the country's wealthiest citizens. He is increasing police end-strength to supplement those already planned for the military. The government has developed a plan to protect travelers along the major roadways. He is pushing the military and the police to gain control of areas and neighborhoods dominated by the narcoterrorists. In those areas where the government is gaining control, they are taking governance to the people by providing more robust social services and the rule of law to support those who previously suffered most from their absence.

The military has had growing operational success against the narcoterrorist organizations across the country, particularly against the mid-level leadership, and all indications are that they will continue to take the fight to the illegal armed groups over the next year. The firm resolve of the Uribe administration, backed by aggressive military operations, has resulted in increased desertions by enemies of the state. These desertions are promising, especially since the government provides a program under which those who leave the FARC voluntarily are put in protected housing and receive health care, education, and work training.

Our forces have trained the staff and soldiers of Colombia's best units, giving these units an added edge of operational effectiveness that is paying dividends. The Colombian Army has established its own Special Operations Command to coordinate and oversee

difficult and complex operations against the most sensitive targets. The establishment and training of a Commando Battalion, modeled on our own Ranger battalions, has given the Colombians a unit that can strike high-value targets including enemy leadership. The Colombian military is also in the process of establishing a Joint Special Operations Command that will synchronize special operations among all branches of the Colombian military. U.S. Southern Command's Special Forces component, Special Operations Command South, will provide training to this new unit. Currently, U.S. military forces are conducting deployments in fourteen different locations in Colombia providing training to nine major Colombian military units. Additionally, Planning Assistance Training Teams are assisting the Colombian army's mobile brigades in operational planning. We have also trained the Colombian urban counter-terrorist unit and continue to upgrade their capabilities and equipment.

We are currently supporting the Government of Colombia's campaign plan to regain territory previously controlled by the narcoterrorists and working with the inter-agency and Congress to fund the plan. The funding will allow us to provide timely training, equipment and logistic support to the Colombian Armed Forces. With this critical support, the Colombian Armed Forces will be able to continue taking the fight to the traditional FARC leadership centers deep in the jungles of southeast Colombia. This area not only is the home of the FARC leadership, but is also the primary source for FARC finances due to its major coca production. This is a historic execution of a strategic plan and is the first time the Colombian Armed Forces have deployed this large of a force against the FARC center of gravity.

U.S. Special Forces also trained Colombian Armed Forces in Arauca to protect a portion of the 772-kilometer oil pipeline that had been a frequent target of FARC and ELN attacks. This training was just one part of a nationwide Infrastructure Security Strategy that protects critical facilities and reestablishes control in narcoterrorist influenced areas of the country.

We continue to train Colombia's helicopter pilots, providing their forces a growing ability to perform air assaults that are key in the battle against dispersed enemies. We deploy intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets in country that have provided timely, actionable intelligence to Colombian units. We are training their staffs with Planning Assistance Training Teams that increase their ability to plan and execute intelligence driven operations against illegal armed groups. We are working with Colombian Marines to establish two Mobile Training Teams that will work with the Riverine Brigade to raise proficiency for riverine interdiction. We contracted logistics to help the Colombians maintain their own C-130 fleet. Toward that end, we are looking forward to establishing long term solutions to readiness issues with the establishment of a National Maintenance Point for Colombia's helicopters, and a Logistical Automation System that will integrate supply and fiscal management for parts and materials for the Colombian military and National Police. We are also assisting in the training of the Colombian National Police Carabineros (Rural) with the goal of reestablishing governance throughout the country.

We also provide medical training and assistance to help the Colombian military improve their health services support to their combat troops. With our support, the Colombian military now has a well-established "Combat Life Saver" training course.

In civil-military operations, we are helping the Colombians to build a civil-affairs capability that will be implemented in the Arauca Department to bring humanitarian aid and functioning institutions to previously terrorized areas. In the past year, with our support, the Colombian military has written and adopted a civil affairs doctrine that allows them to minimize the impact of their military operations on the civilian population, while at the same time synchronizing humanitarian assistance with their operations. In the departments of Arauca, Cundinamarca, Caquetá, and Guaviare – portions of the last three are in the former despeje – the Colombian military has provided basic medical care to over 20,000 civilians and rehabilitated a number of educational and medical facilities. Similar events are planned in conjunction with other Colombian ministries in the months ahead. In addition, our Civil Affairs forces have worked with the office of the Minister of Defense to develop mechanisms that synchronize the inter-agency planning requirements needed to re-establish governance in previously ungoverned spaces. To this end, the Government of Colombia established a Coordination Center for Integrated Action. This incipient inter-agency body – consisting of representatives from the office of President Uribe, the ministries of defense, interior, education, and others – has been tasked with developing policies and plans to ensure that as the Colombian military successfully reclaims narcoterrorist controlled areas that the other bodies of government rapidly respond, establish presence, and provide the population with the government services they did not have while under control of the illegally armed groups.

Beyond our coordinated military efforts, President Uribe has sponsored political, economic, and judicial reforms. These measures will assist the Colombian economy as

well as free up resources for increased security measures. President Uribe aims to reduce the government bureaucracy, eliminate corruption, and enact fiscal reform.

Economically, President Uribe's stance and the promised reforms have buoyed the country's confidence. The government of Colombia has collected 18 percent more taxes compared to last year. Further, tax collection (as a percentage of GDP) rose from 16 percent in 2002 to 19 percent in 2003. Colombia has raised over one billion dollars via bonds since the new administration took office, and its stock market has increased by 50 percent this year. Likewise, President Uribe has sought to stamp out corruption and bolster judicial reform.

This list is just a partial highlight of the coordinated effort the Colombian government is making to solve its own problems. President Uribe has infused his government with energy, organization, and a sense of purpose. He understands that this is primarily a Colombian problem, one which Colombia must solve, yet he still needs our help to make his efforts ever more effective. President Uribe stood by us as a member of the Coalition of the Willing in Operation Iraqi Freedom, a stance unpopular with the Colombian public. He is providing the strategic leadership that Colombia needs to move ahead. Recent polls show public confidence in him and the military remains strong. However, there are already some indications that the FARC will exercise strategic patience and attempt to wait out President Uribe and Plan Colombia. Failure to assist the Government of Colombia at this critical juncture could very well facilitate the necessary conditions for the FARC to regain the strategic initiative.

Under President Uribe, our country's significant investment in Plan Colombia and the Andean Ridge Initiative are showing substantial results. He is fully adhering to Plan

Colombia and already looking well beyond it. Most notably a subsidiary campaign plan provides a long-term strategy and has been coordinated across the Colombian services, the interagency and our military. This campaign plan details the systematic defeat of Colombia's narcoterrorists. He is building the systems that will eventually return Colombia to the ranks of peaceful and prosperous nations. President Uribe has only two more years in office. Consequently, it is critical – especially this year and next – that he gets our unwavering support to set all his long-term initiatives firmly into place.

### **Way Ahead**

We are seeing the pendulum swing in Colombia, and we will continue all of our planned training and support as well as seeking new opportunities to increase that support at this critical juncture. Colombia is the linchpin in the narcoterrorist battle, but we must be careful not to win the battle in Colombia and lose the war in the region. As the Colombians make progress, their success will push narcoterrorists to seek safer areas in which to operate. Already, the FARC, ELN, and AUC operate across the porous borders of Colombia's neighbors, and the remote nature of many of these areas makes them ever more attractive as safe havens. While we are seeing increased coordination and cooperation among most of Colombia's neighbors, some of those countries also lack the resources to maintain territorial sovereignty in these ungoverned spaces. Thus, across the Andean Ridge, we are working with the bordering nations to increase cooperation further, fortify borders and strengthen capabilities.

Recognizing that we are at a critical and decisive point in our support to Colombia, I have reorganized an element of my staff to focus exclusively on current operations and

long term planning for Colombia. I have reorganized our personnel operating in Colombia to maximize the support we can provide and gain every possible efficiency while operating within the mandated cap on military and civilian personnel.

The current personnel cap limits the U.S. presence in Colombia to 400 military personnel and 400 contractors. We manage the cap on a daily basis, rigorously remain under the ceilings, and frequently must cancel or postpone planned personnel travel to Colombia, request aircraft to reduce crew size, create complicated work-around schedules for aircraft flights, or simply cut back on training. The Administration has requested an increase of the personnel cap to 800 military personnel and 600 civilian contractors in Colombia in support of Plan Colombia.

The request to seek an increase in the personnel ceilings is a change from our previous belief that we could continue our programs efficiently under the previous ceilings. The progress made by President Uribe and Colombia have led us to conclude that there is a real opportunity, with only a small increase in U.S. personnel, if we are to achieve our policy goals in Colombia. I would emphasize that we do not seek to change the prohibition on U.S. involvement in combat.

To date the impact of the personnel cap has been small. In the coming year, however, as the Colombian Military conducts full-scale operations across the depth of the country, the personnel cap will begin to have a deleterious effect on the mission. While U.S. personnel will not be directly on the front lines with the Colombian troops, more training and planning assistance at a variety of headquarters is required since a greater portion of the Colombian Military will be directly engaged on a broader front in operations to defeat the narcoterrorists. We should reinforce success this year rather than constraining



ourselves with a cap number that made sense at the beginning of Plan Colombia, but has not been adjusted for the current and future situation on the ground.

As the lead Department of Defense agent for implementing military aspects of U.S. policy in Colombia, U.S. Southern Command will continue to maintain a priority effort against narcoterrorism. Key in most of our recent endeavors has been approval by the U.S. Congress of Expanded Authority legislation. This legislation has allowed us to use funds available for counterdrug activities to provide assistance to the Government of Colombia for a coordinated campaign against the terrorist activities of its illegal armed groups. The granting of Expanded Authority was an important recognition that no meaningful distinction can be made between the terrorists and drug traffickers in our region. All three of Colombia's terrorist groups are deep into the illicit narcotics business. Trying to decide whether a mission against a FARC unit was a counterdrug or counterterrorist one was an exercise in futility and hampered operational effectiveness on the ground. Expanded Authority has eliminated the time consuming step of first evaluating the mission based on its probable funding source and now allows us to bring to bear all our assets more rapidly. As just one example, it will allow assets controlled by JIATF-South to continue being used to their full potential to provide real-time, actionable intelligence that is key in conducting effective operations against the narcoterrorists. Additionally, JIATF-S will take an increased role in counter-illicit trafficking, as many materials other than narcotics use the same transit routes through our area of responsibility. Expanded Authority for FY05 and beyond is the single most important factor for us to continue building success in Colombia. While our efforts are, for good reason, Colombia-centric, we are not letting others fall behind to become the next targets

for terrorist groups. The cooperative counter narcoterrorist groundwork we are laying today will further our national security for decades to come.

## **Conclusion**

The future security and stability of Colombia and the United States, indeed all of Latin America and the Caribbean as well, are now, more than ever, tied inextricably together. Latin America and the Caribbean are important to the United States strategically, economically, and culturally, and our ties will only grow stronger over time. Many of the region's countries are consolidating democracies, however, that will take time to mature. Meanwhile, these countries face uncertainty, whether from weak institutions that have yet to undergo multiple cycles of free elections or from disappointment that liberal market reforms have not yet produced sustained improvement. It is upon these inherent vulnerabilities that criminal organizations prey. Illegal armed groups foster corruption, greed and instability and undermine the best efforts of dedicated public servants and honest citizens. Corruption and instability create safe havens for not only narcoterrorists and drug traffickers but also for other international terrorists.

It will be up to those nations to demonstrate their ability to govern, enforce the rule of law, implement judicial reform, and develop a profound respect for human rights. These fundamentals provide the stable and secure environment necessary for economic growth – growth that will improve the quality of life for ordinary citizens. Southern Command plays a crucial role in assisting the development of security forces that help provide the ability to govern throughout the region, particularly in Colombia.

We are at a critical time in Colombia's history. The elected government of President Uribe enjoys unparalleled approval ratings approaching 80 percent. Under his leadership,

the military and police are helping to regain control of areas long held by narcoterrorists. Colombia's citizens are taking a more active role in their nation's defense and providing actionable intelligence to the Colombian Armed Forces. There is a renewed sense of momentum, commitment, and hope as the Colombian people struggle to save their country, but there is also a finite window of opportunity beyond which public opinion and support will wane without significant progress.

I am optimistic about the progress we are seeing in Colombia, though there remains an enormous amount of work to be done. We are at a critical point where the progress in eliminating conflict, reducing tension, and establishing democracy throughout the region could be at risk if we are not steadfast in our efforts. While our attention is drawn to another region of the world, we must keep in mind that we live in this hemisphere, and its continued progress as a region of democracy and prosperity is paramount to our national security.

I would like to thank the Chairman and the Members of the Committee for this opportunity and for the tremendous support you have provided this command. I can assure you that the men and women of the United States Southern Command are working to their utmost to accomplish their missions for our great country.