

Speech by President Alvaro Uribe Velez
At a ceremony for the promotion of officers of the National Army
and the awarding of medals

Bogota, December 5, 2003

We gather here today at this symbolic field of our military to graduate and promote a group of its members that have loyally persevered in seeking to assume greater responsibilities. And what a responsibility! --That of totally destroying terrorism in order to restore the people's faith in their government.

During these past few weeks there have been a few changes within the Public Forces. Some have left after completing their duty; many of them amidst the gratitude of their fellow countrymen and the affection of their ranks. Honorable, competent and resolved fighters and police officers have assumed charge.

It is up to those who now direct the forces to show with results that terrorism will be wiped out of Colombia. The nation does not want appeasement, delay, or reasoning to justify inaction or failure, nor nice theories that explain the continued existence of the terrorists. The country's expectations are rather those of defeating terrorism, assuring peaceful coexistence and achieving the victory of democracy. We must listen to this resounding voice of opinion, take it as an order and, last but not least, honor it.

Among the many qualities that are required of a member of the Public Forces, whatever his rank, there are a few that stand out: honesty, managerial and leadership ability, austerity, ability to do team-work, communication skills, penchant for victory, fighting spirit and an openness toward the citizens, both in the cities and in the countryside.

Honesty: This historic moment has given rise to a colorful challenge for our military: to proceed with the necessary efficiency to destroy terrorism and to do that with full transparency, so that the rule of human rights shines in every occasion. Those who bear the arms of the Republic cannot aid or abet criminals, neither by action nor by omission. Transparency must be present in every act, including acts falling outside of military service, as well as in personal conduct. It should govern all armed actions, personal conduct, the management of public funds, the relationship with the people and so on and so forth. We will continue cementing public confidence through the valiant decisions of the country's soldiers and police who reject money coming from the drugs business and from other illegitimate sources that support terrorism.

Managerial and leadership ability: Each one of you must be a manager and a leader. A manager with regard to a proper handling of resources, under the conviction that efficiency is the result of combining the best ratio of effectiveness at the lowest cost. A manager to contribute to the administrative reform that the group of entities attached to the Defense Ministry still lacks in order to obtain greater goals of efficiency. A leader with the clear vision of a Colombia free of violence, free of drugs and free of terrorism and kidnappings, and at the same time a friendly Colombia with equality and prosperity that provides happiness to its children.

Austerity: Austerity and decorum constitute fundamental values for the family, the society and the nation. Our fellow citizens make a big effort to adjust to the military's budget. One sees this effort rewarded with efficiency and austerity. We must keep a strict will to combat wastefulness. Out of the Defense Ministry's budget come Colombia's peace, as well as your remuneration and the payment of pensions and social security. We should manage these resources with great care and austerity. This is why we must design and put into practice all the necessary reforms in order to save resources. With our commitment to multiply the yield of those resources, we should be able to set an example to the countries that support us. We must be aware that victory depends on our own growing efforts and not on the whim of making it continuously conditional on an enlargement of the budget. May all public offices and social gatherings show the respectable seal of austerity.

Ability to do teamwork: There is great interdependence in today's world. Nothing is possible through individualism. Everything demands the formation of teams and task forces. Every time one of these groups is set up differences arise, because it's inevitable. But we always have the chance of handling these differences in a creative way, with the common intention that everybody contributes to the success of the task ahead. If we don't learn how to manage differences, we will just fail. The more solid the integration of the team is, the better access to resources, the faster the response, the lower the cost, the higher the productivity. Anguish will be spared and there will be more reasons to rejoice.

Teamwork must also be present in the international field. Those in the international community who support us are accountable for their actions to their institutions and their constituencies. In order for them to support us, we must allow them to share with us the How and the Why. In order for them to provide us with assistance, they must be informed about the way it is going to be used and they must be able to foresee the consequences.

Communication skills: Each member of the public forces must be a good communicator. Communication is needed both internally and externally, internally among superiors and subordinates and vice versa. The rules of discipline and the hierarchy that prevail within the military appear to run against vertical communication from below to the top. And I say "appear" because in reality that dialogue is not only allowed but is required in order to enrich the opinion of those who are in command. And when such communication takes place in a constructive atmosphere, it results in consolidating order, rather than affecting it. On the other hand, failures and obstacles must be communicated to the outside world timely and without distortions. The people forgive mistakes, but not the hiding of them. The best communicator is the one who listens best. Everyone from peasants to city dwellers must be heard and their demands must be promptly answered in order for them to trust our efforts. The country's soldiers and police must persuade the public about the goodness of their work. To preach what has not been done is harmful, but to preach what is done is essential.

Penchant for victory: The terrorism that is hitting us cannot be perpetuated. We must urgently defeat it. The penchant and courage for victory are necessary and legitimate. They are necessary because if we are determined to destroy terrorism we will achieve it, but if we dither terrorism will continue. They are legitimate because never in history a democratic State, respectful to the people and the rule of law, has been defeated by crime. They are legitimate also because democratic security has demonstrated that it benefits all Colombians and does not make distinctions between the different expressions of political thought. The mood of victory is appropriate at this moment in which the country is resolved to end terrorism, for better or for worse.

Fighting spirit: There should not be one single moment without battle until we reach victory. The uniforms and weapons of our military should become a living symbol of an aggressive stance against terrorism. Instead of giving in to the plague of terrorists, we should fight them until their extermination. The country's soldiers and police must be permanently alert and willing to take the initiative. If we keep this fighting spirit, terrorism will go from arrogance to despair and decomposition, until its final disintegration. Caution cannot stop action, nor can action be rash. Strategy should be defined without fear and risk must be assumed by planning. We require more risk than calculation, but always with talent in order to translate the richness of our men into the happiness of our country.

Openness toward the citizens, both in the cities and in the countryside - Take to the streets and countryside: Victory cannot be achieved inside the office; it is achieved in the streets and in the countryside. May the country's soldiers and police not crowd the offices of public buildings; they should throw themselves into the street and the countryside to accompany the people and liberate them from the nightmare of terrorism.

We need the results to be larger than the size of the military. May each soldier and police be an anti-terrorist commander, a collector of information, an intelligence processor, a community organizer, a winner against crime. May each citizen be prepared and organized to support the Public Forces.

Soldiers and police of my country:

May the new generations glimpse the happiness that this great nation of ours will achieve and may they daily have reasons to honor and love their Public Forces.