

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

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Chairman Rubio, Ranking Member Menendez, Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for convening this hearing to discuss Colombia. Colombia is a strategic U.S. partner at a critical moment in its history. We are working with the Colombian government on their efforts to implement its peace accord with the FARC. Colombia is one of our most willing and capable partners in the region. A Colombia at peace will strengthen its ability to support mutual priorities, including promoting a stable and democratic region and countering narcotics trafficking, transnational crime, terrorism, and irregular migration.

As conditions deteriorate in Venezuela, further instability has the potential for tremendous negative impact on its neighbors and the region. The situation in Venezuela carries special risks for Colombia. Every day, thousands of Venezuelans cross the border and return home after purchasing basic goods in Colombia. Colombia has joined the United States and other OAS member states in issuing statements offering to assist the people of Venezuela in addressing their political, economic, and humanitarian crises. We will continue to work with Colombia and other regional partners to promote a peaceful, democratic resolution to Venezuela's challenges.

As you all know, the Colombian government finalized a peace accord with the FARC in November 2016. Colombia has made some important progress implementing the accord. Nearly 7,000 FARC rebels peacefully relocated to 26 UN-monitored disarmament zones. UN officials confirmed the rebels completed the surrender of fighters' individual weapons June 27, a significant step in the parties' ongoing efforts to implement the accord. The parties agreed to decommission more than 900 weapons caches outside the zones by September 1. The Colombian government passed key peace accord implementing legislation,

including an amnesty law, a law on political participation, and laws to set up the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (SJP). The SJP is designed to hold accountable those most responsible for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and gross human rights violations.

The mandate for the UN Security Council-authorized special political mission to oversee the bilateral ceasefire and the FARC's disarmament expires in September. The UN Security Council unanimously approved a resolution July 10 authorizing a follow-on UN special political mission, which will begin September 26 and focus on monitoring and verifying implementation of security guarantees and FARC's reintegration into Colombian society.

Colombia is investing heavily in its own future and will cover 90 percent of the peace accord implementation costs. Our critical contribution will be providing U.S. expertise to enhance Colombia's own implementation efforts. Our programming in Colombia thus focuses U.S. assistance on: (1) security, including counternarcotics efforts and reintegration of ex-combatants; (2) the expansion of state institutions and presence in former rebel areas, including rural economic development and humanitarian demining; and (3) justice services and other support for victims.

We also continue to provide bilateral assistance to support Colombia's efforts to dismantle illegal armed groups, which have been responsible for violence against civil society activists. We are coordinating with the Colombian government to see how our support would be most helpful. A stronger, stable Colombia that protects human rights is in the U.S. interest, and we are committed to supporting Colombia's continuing efforts to strengthen the rule of law, promote transparency and accountability, combat crime, and increase respect for human rights.

We are monitoring risks to peace plan implementation and working to help the Colombians mitigate them. The surge in coca cultivation and cocaine production is the greatest threat to peace, but also is a threat to the United States and the region. Record levels of coca cultivation and production strengthen illegal armed groups operating in Colombia, undermine rural security, and corrupt Colombia's institutions down to the local level. As President Trump told President Santos during his visit to Washington in May, the drug epidemic is poisoning too many American lives and more concentrated efforts are critical in order to reverse these alarming trends.

On counternarcotics cooperation, we are working together to implement a whole-of-government plan, first in the critical drug-producing region of Tumaco and then in other areas, to help reduce cocaine production. Our efforts over the last 15 years have proven that attacking cartel organizations, interdiction, and eradication operations should be front and center in their efforts and must be linked with alternative development to make a durable effect on communities affected by the drug trade. Unity of effort across Colombia's security and civilian agencies and continued cooperation with the United States will be critical to successfully combat narco-trafficking and solidifying the peace.

Our programs will also expand humanitarian demining operations across the country – supporting the U.S.-Norway-led Global Demining Initiative for Colombia – to facilitate rural economic development, land restitution, and victims' reparations. In addition, we are supporting the government's work to restore more than 84,516 hectares of land to 11,401 displaced persons, while USAID assists the development of licit economic opportunities and alternatives to coca with programs for small businesses.

We are also making progress in promoting human rights in Colombia, though there are significant challenges. We are deeply concerned by reports of increased killings and threats against human rights defenders and social activists. Increased attacks on civil society activists are also a threat to peace. It is essential to quickly and thoroughly investigate and prosecute those responsible for these crimes. We welcome Colombia's recent advances to prioritize investigations of killings and threats against human rights defenders and civil society activists. Concrete results, including convictions, are critical to prevent future violence.

The investments we have made in Colombia over close to two decades – whether through foreign assistance, messages of bipartisan political support in Washington, or time invested building relations with the Colombian government and people – have benefited the United States in security, economic, and political gains. The support of the U.S. Congress has been instrumental to everything the United States has achieved with Colombia, and your support will be needed now more than ever as Colombia attempts to find a real and lasting peace.

Chairman Rubio, Ranking Member Menendez, Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to meet with you today and for your continuing commitment to helping advance U.S. national security and economic prosperity in Colombia.

I look forward to your questions.

