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COLOMBIA

Statement by H.E. Mr Jorge Humberto Botero
Minister of Commerce, Industry and Tourism

It is well known that Colombia is experiencing enormous problems as a result of widespread acts of violence, especially in rural areas, and terrorist attacks carried out by groups of various ideological persuasions, although they all share a single common denominator: massive funding from drug trafficking. The Government, with the overwhelming support of the people, is making every effort to eliminate this source of financing. Under the firm leadership of the President of Colombia, the last year has seen a dramatic reduction in the area sown with illegal crops, while considerable success has been achieved in restoring public safety. Human rights have been scrupulously respected in the implementation of this task.

Colombia is doing its duty for the good of humanity, and naturally hopes that its efforts will be fully reciprocated by the international community. The liberalization of external markets and the elimination of distortions, especially with regard to agricultural products, is the kind of response that many developing countries expect from more prosperous nations in order to balance the benefits of free trade. Colombia, moreover, is both a victim and a leading player in the fight to free the world from the grip of drug addiction.

My Government is aware of the need to strengthen the multilateral rules that should govern agriculture. This implies a firm commitment to substantially reduce trade-distorting domestic support, significantly improve market access and progressively eliminate all forms of export subsidization, albeit within a pre-established time-frame. On that understanding, we welcomed the launch of a new round of WTO trade negotiations in Doha two years ago.

Given our commitment to a development round, we firmly believe that the time has come for countries with the strongest economies to assume greater responsibilities. On that basis, we could build a fairer, more equitable system and, even more importantly, address the underlying causes of major global problems, such as the unmanaged increase in migratory flows, inadequate land use, desertification and failure to make progress in efforts to combat poverty.

We simply cannot ask our farmers to face increased competition from abroad while the agricultural sector continues to be unfairly excluded from the multilateral disciplines. Let us not forget that many of our rural inhabitants ended up growing illegal crops on account of the lack of market opportunities for their products. If there had been better access for tropical products, there would undoubtedly have been fewer coca or poppy fields.

In spite of the harrowing conflicts that plague the Middle East, the world is experiencing a period of unprecedented peace. It is no accident that, as the experience of Europe over the past 50 years shows, the triumph over war has coincided with the growth of trade. We know from ancient

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times that peoples with mutual trade links tend to be peace-loving. The contribution we expect from rich countries is a guarantee of fair trade for poor and developing countries, which means free access for their products and the elimination of distortions that prevent them from competing. By acting in this way, they would be making a significant contribution towards peace in the world.
