



Colombia FTA Facts

Office of the United States Trade Representative
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Colombia: On a Path to Peace, Justice and Prosperity

“Uribe’s government has made major strides, persuading tens of thousands of combatants to lay down their arms. Murders and kidnappings, the tools of choice during the decades of lawlessness, have dropped dramatically. The result is a more stable country with a booming economy and a strong diplomatic relationship with the U.S. Moreover, Uribe stands for democracy and free markets on a continent that has veered sharply left toward state control.”

Chicago Tribune, June 23, 2007

Seven years ago, Colombia was nearly a failed state. Violence was rampant, Colombians were fleeing their country, and economic activity was plummeting. Since then, Colombia and the United States have worked together to combat violence and instability. Together we have made extraordinary strides in a few short years. U.S. assistance and tariff preferences under the Andean Trade Preference Act have been key elements of our joint strategy to promote peace, justice and prosperity. Examples of progress include:

PEACE

- **Peace Process:** Since the Colombian Government enacted the Justice and Peace Law in 2005, which set the rules under which paramilitary members would demobilize and be brought to justice, over 31,000 members from 35 paramilitary groups – principally from the AUC (United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia) - have demobilized. In addition, in response to the Colombian government’s efforts to defeat the illegal groups operating within its borders, since 2002, more than 10,500 members of the far left insurgent groups FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and ELN (National Liberation Army) have chosen to individually demobilize, leaving their units and turning themselves in to Colombian authorities.
- **Steep Decline in Violence:** Through Plan Colombia, the Colombian Government stepped up its efforts to enhance territorial control and reduce violence throughout the country. As a result, since President Uribe took office in 2002, the security situation has improved significantly, with kidnappings down by 83 percent, terror attacks by 76 percent. Homicides have decreased by 40 percent and homicides against trade unionists have dropped by twice as much (over 80 percent). In 2007, the rate of homicides of unionists was less than one seventh that of the general population.
- **Protection Programs:** The Colombian government is providing protection to over 10,600 individuals. The largest protection program is run by the Ministry of Interior and Justice and provides protection to more than 9,400 individuals, including over 1,900 trade union members. Of the program’s \$39.5 million budget, one third – \$13.1 million – goes to protect trade unionists.
- **Expanded Police Presence:** As part of its effort to bring security and stability to all of its territory, Colombia has established a police presence in each of its 1,099 municipalities (equivalent to U.S. counties). Increased police presence has secured primary and secondary roads throughout

the country, freeing Colombians to travel by road without fear of attack. As a result, ridership on these roads has doubled since 2002, and commerce is flowing between areas that were once isolated by violence. To combat illegal groups, the Colombian government has established 108 new rural police stations, staffed with over 4,000 new officers.

- **Increased State Presence:** Increased security has led to real changes in people's lives. Once forced to govern from afar due to fear, mayors have returned to their communities and are working with the national government to provide state services. Colombia is once again providing judicial, community, health and education services in many areas where it was once too dangerous to do so.
- **Containing Narcotics Trafficking:** The Colombian government is continuing to battle narco-trafficking, which provides the funding base for illegal armed groups. Interdiction and eradication successes have kept an average of 400 metric tons of cocaine per year from reaching the U.S. market, depriving terrorist groups of hundreds of millions in funds to buy arms and mount attacks.

JUSTICE

- **Paramilitary Ties Investigated and Prosecuted:** To ensure all persons with alleged paramilitary links are brought to justice, Colombia's judicial authorities are – with the full support of the Uribe Government – aggressively investigating and prosecuting legislators, government officials and military officers tied to such allegations.
- **AUC Leaders Under Arrest:** Twenty-three former paramilitary leaders are incarcerated in maximum security jails. The remaining senior leaders, who refused to surrender, are being sought by Colombian authorities. Former paramilitaries that commit new crimes will lose their right to reduced sentences under the Justice and Peace Law.
- **No Amnesty:** In comparison to other peace processes from Guatemala to South Africa, Colombia's process offers reduced sentences, but no amnesty, and significant reparations must be paid to victims by perpetrators. The government is prosecuting all former paramilitary members accused of serious crimes. If convicted, they will serve sentences of up to eight years.
- **Combating Impunity:** In Colombia, progress on investigation and prosecution of cases was hampered by an overburdened, outmoded criminal justice system. To combat the impunity that resulted from this old system, the country has replaced it with a new oral accusatory system under which criminal cases move from arrest to verdict in months instead of years, and conviction rates have increased from less than 3 percent to over 60 percent. To combat impunity in cases of violence against trade unionists, an independent special prosecutor's unit with a budget of \$1.5 million was established in October 2006 to rapidly investigate and prosecute 187 such priority cases, which were identified in cooperation with Colombia's trade unions and the International Labor Organization.
- **Extensive Cooperation on Extradition:** Colombia has extradited over 680 narcotics traffickers and terrorists to the United States, including over 620 since President Uribe took office in 2002.

PROSPERITY

- **Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction:** GDP per capita has almost doubled since 2002, while poverty has declined almost 20%. Unemployment is at its lowest level in a decade. Wages have risen about 10% since 2000, while inflation has dropped from about 15% to about 6%.
- **Trade Growth:** Colombia's exports to the United States grew 36% from 2000 to 2007, while U.S. exports to Colombia grew 132%.