

Speech: Building stability in Colombia

Thank you very much indeed, Mr President and can I welcome you again to the Council. Thank you for being with us today. I would also like to welcome the Colombian Foreign Minister who has visited us before, but thank you again for being with us. And obviously a big welcome to the Special Representative in his first appearance before the Council. I think you and your team have made a very good start after just two weeks but that was a very helpful briefing. So thank you very much for that.

May I begin, Mr President, and Minister by reiterating our condolences to all those affected by the bomb attack in Bogota last week. There's no justification for such violence and we condemn terrorist acts in all their forms. It is good that the Council was able to issue a statement. I think the attack underlines the significance of the end of the armed conflict with the FARC. It reminds us of the importance of pressing ahead with work to implement the peace agreement in order to consolidate peace and build stability. And I think the focus we heard today on the implementation of the peace agreement has been very important.

I wanted to start where the Special Representative finished by saying that I think the Council has been pleased to support Colombia in this important process and the Council has been united in doing so. As the Special Representative said, Council support is a vital pillar of helping Colombia achieve success in the peace process and as the pen holder I can promise you that we will do our utmost to ensure that continues.

I wanted also, Mr President, to welcome steps that the new Colombian Government has taken over the last three months – particularly towards the effective reintegration of former FARC members and the comprehensive rural development. This is particularly through the development programs of the territorial approach. I was very interested in what Special Representative had to say about the economics – particularly in respect of education and food – and what is happening in the 24 territories. It's very good to have that level of detail.

I think we share the hope set out in the Secretary-General's report that Colombia's peace with legality plan can bring both security and economic development to former conflict areas. And we see the upcoming year as an opportunity for the government to cement and build on achievements over the past two years since the peace agreement was signed. But as the Secretary-General also said there are considerable challenges and in particular I'd like to use today, Mr President, to highlight two issues that we believe deserve the Colombian Government's urgent attention.

The first is that we share the Secretary-General's alarm regarding the increasing killings of human rights defenders and social leaders by organised criminal groups competing for rival territory. The Special Representative gave us some more detail on that. The lack of state presence and the persistence of violence in these areas risk undermining the peace process if

people lose faith in the state's ability to provide safety and economic opportunity.

Secondly, Mr President, we concur with the Secretary-General's call for increased coordination across state institutions. A coherent and holistic approach to tackling security and development issues in former conflict areas is vital. The peace with legality plan recognises the need to coordinate implementation with other policies on security, drugs and protection of leaders. Bringing these plans together and, most importantly, delivering them will be crucial to preventing renewed cycles of violence.

I'd like to conclude also by thanking Jean Arnaud, the previous Special Representative for his significant contribution to Colombia's peace process. And once again to reiterate our full support to the new Special Representative and our full support to the Colombian Government Minister. We are fully committed to working with you and the rest of the Council as you work towards securing a lasting and sustained peace.

Thank you very much Mr President.