

## Address by His Excellency Andrés Pastrana Arango President of the Republic of Colombia

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I proudly represent a country that stands on guard for democracy. A people that has not only lived in democracy for more than 181 years but is ready to fight the good fight to consolidate and strengthen it, within our borders and throughout the continent.

In the face of the winds of destruction blown by senseless violence and illegal drugs, Colombia has always maintained its adherence to solutions in law. And our strength is our unwavering faith in the principles of freedom and democracy.

We have suffered greatly. We have suffered the havoc of violence, but our democracy has not been brought to its knees. It lives on, eager to become ever stronger, ever more transparent.

Without a doubt, if democracy in Colombia were weak, it would already be a thing of the past. But this is where our strength lies, with the free and decisive participation of our people in political decisions and in our republican institutions.

Colombia's commitment to democracy and to the rules and mechanisms to preserve and strengthen it, established by the Organization of American States and other regional organizations such as the Rio Group and the Andean Community, and global programs, is firmer than ever today. We offer our firm support to the initiative to pull all these efforts together into one great guiding chart that will systematize and unite the various instruments of the Americas to defend and promote democracy.

My country is a link in the long chain of democracy in the Americas — a strong and secure link, which courageously confronts the threats that surround it and menace its future.

Colombia has been the victim of a world problem, illegal drugs, and of an internal conflict that feeds on this scourge, but it does not renounce its right to live and make progress in peace, nor its obligation to help build greater solidarity into the inter-American system.

The groups that cause violence in Colombia are not struggling to deliver the people from a tyranny or a dictatorship that violates human rights, as has happened in other parts of the world. Our conflict has been stirred up by minority groups that have wrongly resorted to arms and have provoked unthinking violence in their opposition to a state and a society in which the majority is convinced that democracy and its peaceful methods of reform are the better way.

In Colombia today, we live at a crucial juncture when society is offering the armed groups a chance to join the democratic system by political and civilian means and to break free from their links to drug trafficking, whose resources have helped to fuel all this violence and the worsening of our conflict.