

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

The Government of Canada thanks the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade's Sub-Committee on Human Rights and International Development for its May 2002 report entitled "*Conflict, Human Rights and Democracy in Colombia: A Canadian Agenda*." The report, based on 11 months of public consultations, makes an important contribution to the ongoing discussion of Canada's role in Colombia and provides valuable direction and guidance for policy decisions of the future.

We appreciate the effort made by the Sub-Committee to call witnesses with a range of views in order to get as complete a picture as possible of the Colombia situation. We also commend members of the Sub-Committee for their interest in travelling to Colombia, in February 2002, to gain further insight by hearing first-hand from Colombians themselves. We believe the fair and balanced view reflected in the report is the result of exposure to the many different perspectives heard over the course of the 11 months.

As the report rightly points out, Colombia is home to the only significant armed insurgency and the gravest human rights abuses in the hemisphere. It is the world's principal producer and distributor of refined cocaine, 70-80% of which ends up in North America, consumed by an estimated 180,000 Canadians a year and supporting organized crime enterprises throughout the country. Colombia has the highest number of internally displaced people in the world after Sudan and Angola, approximately two million. It also has the highest number of kidnappings; in 2001, more than 3,000 people were kidnapped, including 303 minors and 49 foreigners. An estimated 3,500 people die each year as a result of the conflict, either through extrajudicial executions, political murders, or in combat.

Given these considerations, Colombia speaks directly to all three Canadian foreign policy objectives: the promotion of prosperity and employment; the protection of our security within a stable global framework; and the projection of Canadian values and culture in the world. Virtually all the elements of the government's human security agenda have some relevance in the Colombian context, including threats to civilians, internal displacement, erosion of state control, drugs and organized crime, environmental contamination, small arms, child soldiers, landmines, accountability and good governance. For these reasons, Colombia is an important foreign policy priority for the Government of Canada, and to an increasing number of Canadians. Prime Minister Jean Chrétien underlined Canada's support for the Government of Colombia when he met President-elect Uribe in Ottawa on June 20, 2002.

This report is timely, coming as it does at the close of the Pastrana Presidency and the beginning of a new administration under Alvaro Uribe Velez. During the Pastrana years, Canada was involved in international facilitation of peace talks with the FARC