

COMMUNICATION BY THE REVOLUTIONARY ARMED FORCES OF COLOMBIA AND THE
GOVERNMENT ON THEIR VISIT TO EUROPE

COMMUNICATION OF THE ROUNDTABLE FOR DIALOGUE (RETURN FROM EUROPEAN VISIT)

2 March 2000

After a visit to Sweden, Norway, Italy, the Vatican, Switzerland, Spain and France, the delegation representing the Colombian state and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército Popular*, FARC-EP met today in Villa Nueva Colombia, the headquarters for dialogue and negotiations, in Los Pozos, in the municipality of San Vicente del Caguán, to evaluate the results obtained and inform the public of the main conclusions of the visit.

Firstly, we reiterate our gratitude to each and every one of the peoples of these countries. We perceive the support of the international community as a positive and significant gesture toward the peace process and the Colombian people.

In line with the agreement reached by the National Roundtable for Dialogue and Negotiation, the delegation undertook this visit to obtain information regarding the first thematic block to be discussed by the roundtable.

This experience has left a permanent mark on the political history of Colombia and clearly shows the progress of this process.

There are various lessons and we have no doubt they will make a significant contribution to the talks of the National Roundtable for Dialogue and Negotiation and the task of the National Thematic Committee in organising public audiences that will guarantee public participation in the peace process.

The country must come up with an economic, political and social model that rejects corruption, drug trafficking and violence to be presented to the Colombian people for their consideration.

It is clear to all that the various experiences in other countries cannot be copied without taking into account our own circumstances.

We heard different presentations of the economic models of the countries we visited, gained first-hand experience of the operation of their economies and discovered the advantages and disadvantages of the application of these models.

The visit has also taught us a number of lessons, which we have summarised below:

What many believe to be impossible is possible

For the first time in the history of a peace process, following decades of conflict, we have travelled abroad to work together to build peace. This shows that everything is possible in the peace process and, furthermore, that it is possible to continue strengthening the space of tolerance and dialogue. In fact, this was one of the most surprising aspects for those who received us in Europe.

Various figures commented that this visit had become, in its own right, a valuable example for other peace processes in the world.

No taboos

In Europe we spoke frankly, with respect and without prohibitions, on issues that for many were untouchable and could even be “postponed”. We showed that there are no taboos in Europe or for the National Roundtable for Dialogue and Negotiation, and that we are willing to continue talks in the country on aspects many people thought to be difficult.

These issues may be addressed from different viewpoints, with the perspective of each party, in an atmosphere of respect, while making clear divergences and convergences.

More trust and respect

Never, since the start of the peace process, have we achieved such trust between the parties as was maintained continuously during the 23 days of the visit. This represents progress in the relationship between the parties, which will undoubtedly be reflected in the roundtable and the negotiations.

The importance of human rights and international humanitarian law

In Europe we made significant progress in discussing an issue that concerns Colombians and the international community, namely respect for human rights and international humanitarian law. From the talks with the president of the International Red Cross Committee (*Comité Internacional de la Cruz Roja*, CICR), we agreed that it is necessary to differentiate between them. We also reached a consensus in another aspect noted in the communication from the mountains of Norway on 11 February: the defence of human rights ultimately corresponds to states, while international humanitarian law is universal.

Regarding this aspect, we also agree on the need for the roundtable to receive advice from CICR on human rights and international humanitarian law, as required.

A broader vision

Opening up to the outside world to discover other experiences expands our vision and contributes to moving away from radical positions. Today nobody doubts that the economy of any country must be seen in the context of a globalised world. This was another way of enriching the roundtable for the negotiations.

International backing

Each of the authorities and institutions we met in the countries we visited clearly stated their backing for Colombia and the peace process, both politically and economically, supporting the work of the National Roundtable for Dialogue and Negotiation. We acknowledge the

importance of the participation of the international community in this process, respecting the free self-determination of peoples.

Similarly, it was also made clear the territorial integrity of the nation is not up for discussion and there will be no “Balkanisation”, as some people mentioned.

Our own process

Information on successful peace processes throughout the world provided by international experts whom we spoke to in Europe made it clear that, as we stated in a communication, the Colombian conflict is unique with respect to others in the world and must be resolved by Colombians and in our own way.

Notwithstanding, there were valuable lessons on methods for negotiations, which can be used in the Colombian process.

Social reforms

The international visit increased our awareness of the need for reforms to deliver peace founded on social justice and the great responsibility of building the new Colombia where everyone has a place.

From the various lessons, we reached the clear conclusion that where reconciliation has failed, it has been because of the lack of a solution to social issues or the lack of the political willpower of the parties.

Consensus is the way forward

One of the predominant factors in the different models shows us that progress and well-being are linked to consensus, thus strengthening the foundations of institutions.

This trip round Europe is without doubt another manifestation that we are making progress on the correct path to a negotiated political solution.

The negotiation process is in progress. We still have much ground to travel and much work must be done by all Colombians to achieve peace. We continue with a fair wind and calm seas.

This visit has been a victory for everyone, above all Colombia.

Now is the time for all Colombians to join us in the historic task of building peace. No one can be left behind in this great task, since this would mean their absence from the new peaceful Colombia with democracy, freedom and social justice, to which we are all committed.

For the National Government:

Victor G. Ricardo,
High Commission for Peace

Luis Norberto Guerra,
Vice-President, House of Representatives

Fabio Valencia Cossio,
Negotiator

Camilo Gomez Alzate,
Negotiator

Juan Gabriel Uribe,
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Miguel Pinedo Vidal,
Thematic Committee

Ciro Ramirez,
Vice-Precident, House of Senate

Luis Carlos Villegas,
President of the National Business Association (Andi).

For the FARC-EP:

Raul Reyes
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Joaquin G6mez,
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Fabian Ramirez,
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Ivan Rios,
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Simon Trinidad,
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Felipe Rincon,
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Olga Lucia Marin,
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