

Building up the peace process in Colombia

Mr. President,, (...) do you remain convinced that dialogue represents the only way to peace?

That is definitely what I think. To bring the armed conflict to an end we must find a political solution, and the most important thing is to give the other side the chance to engage in dialogue. In the 36 years this conflict has lasted, this is absolutely the first time that negotiations have been undertaken, that a list [of] negotiating points has been agreed on. [What is at stake is to] put new elements in place to reinforce the process and build trust in it once again.

What is at the end of the process? Are the guerrillas to be integrated into society and become part of the political landscape, as has occurred in Guatemala or El Salvador?

That is exactly what we are trying to find out: How can the guerrillas become participants in the democratic political process? For the FARC this is nothing new. They already tried it once; unfortunately, it was a very negative experience for them. So we have to understand their mistrust. Building trust is therefore fundamental.

You have also noticeably strengthened the military. Is a military solution the final option, in case dialogue fails?

The Colombian state cannot afford not to strengthen the military. FARC has rejected offers to negotiate peace in the context of a cease fire, so we have been forced not only to reinforce the military, but also - and this is far more important - to restructure it with an eye to the future. (...) Since then we have achieved greater success against the rebels.

Source: «I hope the peace process will be irreversible» - An Interview with Colombia's President Andrés Pastrana, Neue Zürcher Zeitung, February 23, 2001