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The Peace Process in Colombia with the ELN: The Role of Mexico

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INTRODUCTION¹

Since President Álvaro Uribe took office in Colombia in August 2002, efforts to find a negotiated settlement to the country's internal armed conflict have focused primarily on demobilization talks with the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia or AUC), a coalition of paramilitary organizations. Peace talks with the largest guerrilla army, the *Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional* (Armed Forces of National Liberation, or FARC), have mostly languished since the collapse of negotiations in early 2002 under Uribe's predecessor, President Andrés Pastrana. Meanwhile, the Uribe administration has maintained on-again, off-again conversations with the smaller guerrilla army, the *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (National Liberation Army, or ELN), meeting directly with ELN commanders in Havana, Cuba, or attempting dialogue through an intermediary.²

This publication highlights a little-known chapter in the peace talks between the Uribe government and the ELN, involving Mexico's role in attempting to jump-start a renewal of direct talks in 2004–2005. Third parties, including governments and civil society organizations such as the Catholic Church, have long been engaged in dialogue efforts with the ELN; as this account demonstrates, the participation of Colombian and international bodies in peace talks has long been an explicit goal of the ELN, in order to establish linkages to civil society

and, ultimately, broadly engage Colombian society in a discussion of needed political and socio-economic reforms.

Five countries—Cuba, France, Norway, Spain, and Switzerland—had been designated as a “Group of Friends” (*Grupo de Países Amigos*) of the ELN peace process in June 2000 during the Pastrana government, and as far back as the administration of President Ernesto Samper (1994–1998), Spain and Germany had encouraged “pre-accords” between the guerrillas and members of civil society organizations in order to foster direct negotiations with the Colombian government. The role of Mexico thus did not represent a departure regarding international involvement with the ELN. Rather, the limited goals of the mediation—to bring the parties closer together and to create the conditions for a meeting in Mexico between Mexican officials and ELN military commanders—demonstrated just how far the peace process with the ELN had deteriorated during the Uribe years.

For example, Colombian High Commissioner for Peace Luis Carlos Restrepo had met with ELN commanders in Cuba during the first months of the Uribe administration. But as a pre-condition for the inauguration of formal talks, the government insisted on a prior cease-fire, a condition rejected by the ELN. These early talks fell apart in December 2002. They were not re-attempted in any serious

1. I am grateful to Latin American Program intern Julián Casal, an M.A. candidate in Latin American Studies at Georgetown University, for research and translation assistance.

2. All three armed organizations—the AUC, FARC, and ELN—have been formally designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations by the U.S. government. The European Union also maintains such a designation.



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way until Mexico became involved in mid-June 2004, with the backing of both the Colombian government and the guerrillas.

The Mexican facilitator in the ELN peace talks, Ambassador Andrés Valencia, spoke at an off-the-record session at the Woodrow Wilson Center on June 21, 2005. The document that follows was authorized and cleared by Mexican authorities; it constitutes Ambassador Valencia's first-hand account of the attempt to arrange a meeting on Mexican soil between ELN military leaders and the Mexican facilitating team, an attempt that, after many months, ended in failure. The exhaustive detail opens a window on the intricate, nuanced, and sustained diplomacy necessary for peace mediation. At the same time, the report underscores several deeper, longstanding issues: the ELN's reliance on kidnapping as a source of revenue and its unwillingness to suspend kidnapping, even during a temporary cease-fire; the importance to the ELN of contact with international and domestic interlocutors; the government's reluctance to permit the guerrillas to open or expand such political spaces; the difficulty of communicating with ELN military commanders through their political representatives (primarily then-imprisoned ELN leader Francisco Galán); and the government's insistence on a cease-fire prior to negotiations when, some would argue, a cease-fire would come precisely as a result of peace talks.

After the breakdown of the Mexican facilitation effort in April 2005, the Uribe government softened several of its positions, seeking talks with the ELN outside of Colombia without requiring a prior truce. In addition, and to foster a more propitious climate for negotiations, President Uribe dropped his longstanding insistence that there was no armed conflict in Colombia, but rather only terrorist actions carried out by criminal organizations. Moreover, in September 2005, the government provisionally released ELN spokesman Francisco Galán from prison so that he could participate in and advance exploratory talks. Meetings between ELN military commanders and the government resumed in Havana in December 2005. Colombian novelist Gabriel García Márquez, as well as diplomats from Cuba, Norway, Spain, and Switzerland, attended some of the meetings.

At what point the Uribe government and the ELN will be able to move beyond "talking about talks" and instead engage on the multiple substantive issues that divide them remains to be seen. It is unlikely that more than symbolic progress will take place prior to Colombia's presidential elections in May 2006. What happens when a new president is inaugurated in August 2006 remains to be seen.

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Ambassador Andrés Valencia

This document presents an overview of the multiple conversations and exchanges that took place not only between the Colombian government, the ELN, and the facilitator, but also those that took place with numerous national and international political actors during thirteen visits to Colombia between June 2004 and April 2005. My account is limited by the need to maintain confidentiality regarding aspects of Mexico's role in facilitating the peace talks. In addition, several of the documents produced during the talks have not been published and there is no certainty that they ever will be. Those limitations notwithstanding, I offer several personal observations about the process.

This essay is divided into seven sections: 1) background on the process of rapprochement between the Colombian government and the ELN under Presidents César Gaviria [1990-1994], Ernesto Samper [1994-1998] and Andrés Pastrana [1998-2002]; 2) the administration of President Álvaro Uribe [2002-present] and the origins of Mexican facilitation; 3) the initial positions of the two parties; 4) the first stage of the process, from June to September 2004; 5) the second stage, from September 2004 to March 2005; 6) the collapse of negotiations in March and April 2005; and 7) some tentative conclusions.

BACKGROUND

Several aspects of the failed attempts over three presidential administrations to negotiate a settlement with the ELN informed Mexico's role as facilitator. First, earlier failures deepened the ELN's conviction that peace can only be achieved through a national convention in which different sectors of society agree on those political, economic and social transformations necessary to bring the armed confrontation to an end. Civil society—not the govern-

ment—would serve as the principal interlocutor in this national convention, which would culminate with the convening of a constituent assembly.

A second issue has to do with the way that dialogue with the ELN in the midst of war creates political problems for the government. In fact, negotiations between the government and the ELN in Havana in 2001 and early 2002 had as their principal objective a cease-fire as the launching point for the peace process. The parties almost reached a cease-fire accord, called "The Comprehensive Agreement on Truce, Cease-Fire, and Cessation of Hostilities." Although the agreement was not signed, the document nonetheless served as a point of reference for Mexico's facilitation.

A third important precedent emerging over the last thirteen years involved national and international facilitators; their existence reflects the political capital accumulated by the ELN in its quest for national and international recognition as a legitimate belligerent force. The various facilitating bodies include the Group of Friends (*Grupo de Países Amigos*), whose members are Cuba, Spain, France, Norway and Switzerland; the Colombian Catholic Church; and finally, the Civilian Facilitating Commission, composed of well-known businessmen, academics, and politicians, many of whom are opponents of President Uribe's policies. Such is the case, for example, of Senator Antonio Navarro, the current presidential candidate of the Democratic Pole (*Polo Democrático*).

A fourth precedent, begun during the days of Samper, involves the designation of two senior imprisoned ELN leaders—Commanders Francisco Galán and Felipe Torres—as the ELN's points of contact with the government and the various facilitation bodies. Both men were incarcerated in Itagüí prison, although Torres was released in October 2003. These two leaders were permitted to communicate via radio-transceiver with the ELN's Central



Command (*Comando Central*, or COCE), and have more or less assumed the role of formal negotiators for the ELN. Relevant to Mexico's facilitation effort was that Galán was formally named Commissioner of the ELN following Torres' release from prison. On numerous occasions, however, Galán's positions differed from COCE's. These differences could reflect difficulties in communication or they could be part of a conscious negotiation strategy. Regardless, they have been a constant throughout the many attempts at dialogue with the Colombian government.

A fifth and final issue has to do with negative impact of publicity about the course of the negotiations, especially when results were made public prematurely. This explains the extreme confidentiality of our work.

THE URIBE ADMINISTRATION

In 2002, during the first months of President Uribe's government, High Commissioner for Peace Dr. Luis Carlos Restrepo held four meetings in Havana with representatives from the COCE. The ELN decided to suspend the dialogue in December 2002, claiming that the conditions for rapprochement with the new administration did not exist.

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During 2003, it proved impossible to reactivate the dialogue. However, following the ELN's kidnapping of eight foreign tourists in the Sierra Nevada of Santa Marta in September, negotiations led to their release. During those talks, there was even a conversation via radio-transceiver between High Commissioner Restrepo and the ELN's military chief, Commander Antonio García. García

appears to have assumed leadership of the guerrilla organization, exercising greater authority than the other four members of the Central Command.

From the beginning of his term President Uribe called on the ELN to engage in a peace process. But the condition demanded by the government—a cessation of hostilities prior to the beginning of talks—was unacceptable to the ELN. The requirement—similar to that at the outset of the process of paramilitary demobilization—was seen by the guerrillas as a demand for submission or surrender.

In essence, the ELN refused to recognize the Uribe administration as a viable interlocutor with which to negotiate a solution to the armed conflict. The ELN proposed instead regional dialogues to address the humanitarian crisis generated by the conflict.

During an official visit to Mexico on May 29, 2004, President Uribe reiterated his call to the ELN for a peace process. He said that he was not demanding demobilization or disarmament in order to begin talks, but that he did demand a cessation of hostilities, to be guaranteed by the international community. The next day, Mexican President Vicente Fox and President Uribe held a joint press conference. President Fox was asked whether Mexico was willing to be the guarantor or one of the guarantors of a cease-fire. Fox responded that Uribe could count on Mexico for any kind of peace initiative.

The ELN responded immediately. On June 1, 2004, the Central Command sent a letter to President Fox praising Mexico's support for the peace process and expressing the ELN's willingness to establish direct communication with the Mexican government.

The foreign ministers of Colombia and Mexico then undertook to elaborate the details of Mexico's participation. On June 8, 2004, in Quito, Ecuador, the foreign ministers agreed that the Mexican government would appoint a facilitator to seek a rapprochement between the Colombian government and the ELN. The facilitator would work towards a cease-fire as the first step in the peace process. I was appointed facilitator on June 16, 2004.

Why did the Colombian government and the ELN attempt a dialogue once again, this time with Mexican mediation?

The answer is a matter of speculation. What is significant, however, is the perception each of the parties had about the other's reasons for engaging. In the eyes of the government, the ELN's decision had to do, among other things, with its growing military weakness; this situation was forcing the ELN to privilege the political struggle in order to preserve its own identity vis-à-vis the FARC.¹ According to the government's view, the electoral victories of the Colombian left in some of Colombia's most important mayoral races and the election of left-leaning governments in several South American countries was encouraging the ELN to explore the possibility of laying down its arms. The government also perceived that the ELN's inclusion in the European Union's list of terrorist organizations—a move undertaken as a result of efforts by the Colombian government—was eroding the status that the ELN had achieved internationally as a result of prior negotiations. At the same time, the wide support in Colombia for President Uribe's democratic security policy and the opening of talks between the government and the paramilitaries were isolating the ELN in the national political arena. In the government's view, these factors made a cessation of hostilities possible to achieve within a relatively short time.

The ELN, for its part, believed that the Uribe administration needed a process of dialogue with the guerrillas in order to compensate for and offset national and international criticism of the negotiations with the paramilitaries. Hence, the guerrillas believed that the government would show great flexibility with respect to the conditions necessary to begin talks, allowing the ELN to reposition itself nationally and internationally as a political interlocutor with the Colombian state.

These assumptions, on both sides, proved exaggerated.

THE INITIAL POSITIONS OF THE PARTIES

My first visit to Colombia as facilitator took place between June 17 and June 24, 2004. By that time, however, the ELN had already publicly established its position regarding the negotiations with President Uribe. On June 4, 2004, during an International

Forum on Land Mines and Humanitarian Accords held in the Colombian Congress, Commander Francisco Galán read a statement by the Central Command proposing “to work for a humanitarian accord in which, in addition to an agreement on the use of mines and explosive devices, there would also be agreement on a general amnesty for political prisoners and prisoners of war, and a bilateral, temporary cease-fire.” Such accords may open the way for a political solution to the Colombian conflict.

On June 14, 2004, the Central Command broadened its proposal through a public communiqué stating that:

1. *The root causes for the existence of the Colombian guerrillas involve antidemocratic and unjust structures that the state has refused to reform, at the same time violently repressing movements for reform. Thus, “a political solution will only be possible if there are social, economic, and political transformations.”*
2. *The Colombian government was unable to adopt a peace policy because it was committed to a strategy of war against the popular movement. Therefore, “we cannot have illusions that the roads to peace will open during this government... But be it now or in the future, it is our obligation to work toward that goal.”*
3. *“With the goal of opening new avenues that can make a political solution viable, we have proposed a humanitarian accord... the first step in building this road to peace. The second step is the elaboration—with society's participation—of proposals for the transformations the country needs in all arenas.”*
4. *“The state and the insurgency must foster the creation of spaces that will enable society in its entirety to participate in the construction of proposals to resolve the crisis... this process of participation in which society plays a direct and leading role is what we refer to as the national convention.”*
5. *“We advocate a process that is open to international contributions. Like Mexico, other nations*



have been supporting and facilitating peace initiatives, based, however, on the premise that the resolution of the conflict is a sovereign affair and a principal task of all Colombians.”

Four days later, we learned the basic elements of the government’s position. These conversations were aimed at informing the facilitator, not at establishing a public position toward the ELN. The government’s position contained the following elements:

1. *The government could not accept a bilateral cease-fire as proposed by the ELN, because such an agreement would place the Colombian armed forces on the same plane as the insurgent organization. Neither, however, would the government demand a unilateral cease-fire. Rather, in a reciprocal fashion, the government would be willing to cease military operations against the ELN if the ELN were willing to suspend all of its violent actions against state forces, the civilian population, and the country’s infrastructure;*
2. *In a peace process with the ELN, no issue would be excluded from the negotiations. However, the fundamental interest of the government was to achieve a cessation of hostilities, given that the negotiation of broad reforms of the Colombian state—both its institutions and its policies—was not viable as long as the conflict with the FARC continued unabated.*
3. *The Colombian government believed that Mexican facilitation, at least during the initial steps of the process, should be exclusive in the sense that no other national or international body would be involved in the facilitation process.*
4. *The Colombian government was aware that at some point the facilitator would need to meet with the Central Command, given that Francisco Galán would not have the authority to conclude agreements. These meetings would have to take place in Mexico, given that, for political and security reasons, it would be very difficult to hold the meetings in Colombia or a third country. At the*

same time, the government believed it was preferable to refrain from adopting the legal and military measures necessary for members of the Central Command to travel to Mexico, until the ELN’s political willingness to enter into agreements could be better ascertained. Otherwise, a trip to Mexico by representatives of the Central Command would only serve to reposition the guerrilla group internationally.

In this context, what were the objectives of Mexico’s facilitation? It was clear that a peace accord would only be possible in the long term, given the government’s reluctance to negotiate with the ELN those political, economic, and social transformations that the guerrillas considered indispensable for demobilization and disarmament. The ELN itself was of the mind that “the paths to peace” would not be possible with the Uribe government. It was also clear that the time available to reach an understanding was limited. Previous negotiations had shown that progress in the negotiations or their successful conclusion would not be possible as national presidential elections approached. We calculated that we had at most twelve months.

Our objective, then, was to reach a limited accord. We urged the two parties to agree on the necessary conditions for beginning a process of dialogue and negotiation. We pointed out that, given the government’s position, one of the conditions that had to be considered was a cessation of hostilities, which could be based on the ELN’s June 2004 proposal for a humanitarian accord. An agreement on this issue did not seem impossible, particularly if the advances made in Havana in

It was therefore worth exploring whether the ELN would be willing to agree to a cease-fire in exchange for specific concessions in the political and social arena. Such an agreement, although modest, could nonetheless be significant, in that it would represent an irreversible step that would foster the trust necessary to make more ambitious agreements possible.



From left to right: Andrew Selee, Director, Mexico Institute; Amb. Andrés Valencia; Cynthia Arson

2002 were reintroduced. In fact, the proposal for an “Integral Truce Accord” (*Acuerdo Integral de Tregua*) elaborated in Cuba included mechanisms for implementing, verifying, and financing a cease-fire and cessation of hostilities. The proposal also contained political elements, most notably a dialogue between the insurgents and various social groups and sectors, on such issues as the design of regional development programs, the eradication of illicit crops, attention to displaced persons, and the removal of antipersonnel mines in specific areas. It was therefore worth exploring whether the ELN would be willing to agree to a cease-fire in exchange for specific concessions in the political and social arena. Such an agreement, although modest, could nonetheless be significant, in that it would represent an irreversible step that would foster the trust necessary to make more ambitious agreements possible.

THE FIRST STAGE OF THE PROCESS: JUNE TO SEPTEMBER 2004

Hopes and wishes aside, the first interview with Commander Francisco Galán on June 23, 2004, made clear that any and all discussions of a cease-fire would have to be postponed. Galán had instructions to discuss only two issues: a proposal for multiple facilitators, and a demand for a formal, public, and written response by the Colombian government to the ELN communiqués of June 4 and 14, 2004, described above.

With respect to “multiple facilitation,” Commander Galán expressed the ELN’s desire for the participation, in addition to Mexico, of other national and international actors that had been active in previous dialogues with the Colombian government. This position, as I stated before, was totally unacceptable to the Colombian government, which wanted at all costs to prevent the ELN from using the talks for the sole purpose of regaining political space vis-à-vis national and international public opinion. The proposal for multiple facilitators also generated significant obstacles for the effectiveness of Mexican representation. The presence of multiple facilitators—in the absence of rigorous coordination—would give rise to multiple messages that, in the end, would make an orderly dialogue with precise objectives impossible. Nor was it viable for the Mexican representative to have to coordinate all of his actions with the diverse governments that make up the Group of Friends, the various personalities that make up the Colombian Civilian Facilitating Commission, and the multiple voices of the Catholic Church.

To address this problem, Commander Galán proposed a formula by which the ELN would agree to the exclusive facilitation of the Mexican government during the first phase of the negotiations, with the understanding that as the process advanced and as the facilitation activities became more diversified and specialized, the Mexican representative would carry out his work with the support of other bodies. From the outset, Galán made it clear that the formula was subject to the approval of the Central



Command; although there was never an official communiqué on the matter, it appeared that at least until February 2005, the Central Command accepted these terms. It is worth mentioning that throughout our work, we kept the Civilian Facilitating Commission, the Group of Friends, and the Catholic Church informed; generally speaking, we always had their active support.

As for the ELN's demand for a response to the June 4 and June 14 documents, it was evident that the Uribe administration would find it difficult politically to formally address an organization classified as "terrorist," or to formulate a counterproposal that would encourage dialogue rather than set certain positions in stone, making them hard to reverse. This explains Commander Galán's request to the Mexican representative that he ask the Colombian government to announce that it had taken note of the ELN's positions and that it had asked the facilitator to explore them in greater detail. The government issued this statement the very next day.

The Central Command never acknowledged the government's statement and instead reiterated its demand for a public response. Hence, on July 3, 2004, High Commissioner for Peace Restrepo wrote to the Mexican representative and raised some issues to be shared with Francisco Galán. In the letter, Restrepo explained that the June 14 communiqué clearly defined two distinct but inter-related steps. The first, which the ELN referred to as the humanitarian accords, had the objective of creating the conditions necessary to realize the second step, the holding of a National Convention. The Commissioner highlighted what he considered to be similarities between the ELN's and the government's proposal: both envisioned a similar starting point—a mutual cessation of hostilities—that would, in turn, open the way for a later phase of dialogue oriented toward the building of peace. Restrepo also specified that in the first phase, the objective would be to create the basis for trust so that the negotiation process could move forward.

Restrepo's letter contained four elements that Mexico considered crucial to achieving rapprochement. First was the idea that the government would suspend its military actions against the ELN in exchange for a cease-fire. Second was the

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government's explicit acceptance of the link between the humanitarian accord and the National Convention. Third was an understanding of the National Convention as a space for broad political dialogue with all of society. And fourth was a clear definition of the objective for the first phase; it was to open the door to an initial accord that would establish the bases for a process of dialogue and negotiation that would include issues beyond those of a strictly military nature. The government included these four elements at the request of the facilitator, despite the objections of some in the administration. Restrepo's letter demonstrated flexibility and was respectful in tone. Commander Galán's first reactions were positive.

There was a great deal of surprise, then, when Commander Galán sent a letter to the Mexican representative on July 9, 2004, immediately releasing it to the press. Galán stated that High Commissioner Restrepo's July 3 letter to the facilitator could in no way be construed as a response to the proposals of the Central Command, given that it was written to the facilitator and contained no clear statement of the Colombian government's peace policy.

The government again showed flexibility in responding to Galán's letter. On August 3, 2004, the High Commissioner for Peace sent a letter to the Central Command reiterating and expanding upon the earlier proposals. The letter left open the possibility of granting pardons to members of the ELN accused of rebellion in exchange for the release of ELN hostages and the initiation of programs to remove anti-personnel mines in specific regions. The letter touched upon each of the elements included in the proposal for the humanitarian accord. It also

expressed the government's commitment to find the necessary financial resources for subsequent phases of the process. In addition, the letter spelled out the government's willingness to explore a mechanism for multiple, progressive, and specialized facilitation that would allow for the gradual incorporation of other national and international actors. Finally, the letter recognized that the government's democratic security policy needed to be complemented by dialogue and negotiation, arguing that peace could only be achieved through a debate on the comprehensive set of issues facing the nation. In this way, the letter manifested the government's willingness to consider the proposal for a National Convention.

The letter of August 3, 2004, was unprecedented. For the first time, the Colombian government was directly addressing the commanders of an insurgent organization, presenting its proposals for peace. Francisco Galán reacted positively to the overall contents of the letter as well as its concrete proposals, even though the government maintained its position of no negotiations preceding the cessation of hostilities and called explicitly for the suspension of kidnapping.

The Central Command responded to the High Commissioner's letter on September 6, 2004. Within days, both letters were made public in the news media.

The ELN praised the government's willingness to carry out a dialogue, but argued that the High Commissioner's failure to refer to the ELN's June 4 proposal demonstrated that "we are speaking different languages." The letter stated that "...we have advanced some. At least we realize that we are speaking to one another, even if we do not understand each other." The COCE also stated that the government was reducing the solution of the conflict to demobilization and disarmament, and before that, to a unilateral cease-fire. The ELN thus ruled out the possibility that it would end "retentions" or kidnappings. It proposed clarifying the visions of peace held by both parties, including the issue of whether or not achieving peace required social and political transformations. Finally, the letter invited the government to show greater flexibility in examining the ELN's proposals, and asked national and international facilitators

to re-elaborate initiatives based on its proposal for a humanitarian accord.

THE SECOND STAGE: SEPTEMBER 2004 TO MARCH 2005

The ELN's September 6, 2004, letter demonstrated that a dialogue via the exchange of correspondence had reached its limits. It also showed that communicating solely through Commander Galán was not allowing for a precise understanding of the ELN's positions. The sense of progress after each interview with Galán at Itagüí prison would later be reversed once Galán received instructions from the Central Command or the COCE released an official statement.

The Mexican facilitator thus suggested to Commander Galán on September 9, 2004, that there be a meeting in Mexico between the Central Command and the facilitator. Such a meeting would provide us with a way of assessing immediately whether the ELN was open to a cessation of hostilities that would include a suspension of kidnappings, and if so, what it would demand in exchange. If the meeting were successful, we hoped it would pave the way for direct dialogue between the government and the ELN.

For reasons of space, it is not possible to recount all of the smaller negotiations that took place between September 2004 and January 2005 to make this meeting possible. Nonetheless, it is important to highlight the gradual movement in the positions of the two parties, as well as the role played by the Mexican representative and other national and international actors to make the meeting possible despite the unfavorable political climate.

Initially, the government reacted coldly to the idea of a meeting between representatives of the COCE and the facilitator. In the government's view, the ELN's September 6 letter showed no sign of its willingness to formally initiate a peace process. The High Commissioner made a counterproposal that there be a period of clarification during which he and Francisco Galán could meet in the presence of the Mexican representative; this meeting could result in consultations via walkie-talkie with the Central Command.



Subsequently, the High Commissioner sent a letter to the Mexican representative on November 2, 2004. He accepted that “if the ELN believes that there are conditions for moving forward in the search for peace, there could be a direct meeting between the guerrilla group and Ambassador Valencia in the Mexican Embassy in Bogotá, as long as the guerrilla organization declares a prior cease-fire, even if it is only temporary.” The government’s proposal represented an important concession, in that it mentioned the possibility of a temporary cease-fire; this position was certainly different than its earlier insistence on an indefinite suspension of hostilities, analogous to the one declared in principle by the paramilitaries.

Finally, in December, Restrepo informed the facilitator that he would not rule out adopting the necessary political and security measures to make the meeting possible, so long as the ELN made a commitment to the Mexican government that there would not be violent actions while the meeting was taking place. What was being talked about was a suspension of hostilities lasting only a few days, and a commitment solely to the Mexican government, not the Colombian government, something that eliminated any perception of submission.

The ELN’s positions also gradually became more flexible. For example, on October 8, 2004, the Central Command wrote the Mexican facilitator to evaluate “your possibly meeting with us, something we are willing to do.” This letter made no mention of our September 9 proposal for just such a meeting. Yet the Central Command, through Galán, rejected both the government’s proposal to hold the meeting in the Mexican Embassy in Bogotá and the government’s demand for a temporary cessation of hostilities; the ELN argued that that latter provision would set a precedent that could allow the government to demand a temporary cease-fire for any and all contact between the ELN and a mediator. In the first week of January 2005, Commander Galán told the facilitator that the Uribe administration’s demand was disproportionate, in that, “we are obliged to meet the condition of the Colombian government for a cessation of hostilities in order for the top authorities of the ELN to meet with you, as a representative of the Mexican government.”

It was not until January 12, 2005, that the ELN wrote back. The letter said that, even though the group did not demand that the government suspend its offensive operations as a pre-condition for the meeting between the Central Command and the Mexican representative—and even though the ELN could not renounce the right to defend itself if attacked—the group had “every intention and will to avoid incidents that could jeopardize the success of the meeting.”

The ELN’s reply came in the midst of a marked deterioration in the political climate from late September 2004 through the end of the year. The press acquired several taped conversations between the High Commissioner for Peace and leaders of the paramilitary forces in Santa Fe de Ralito.² Cornered by these revelations, government representatives argued that there was a strict equivalence between the paramilitary forces and the insurgent groups, something that reduced the spaces for negotiation with the ELN. Soon thereafter, President Uribe referred in public to the confidential communiqués sent by the Central Command and the High Commissioner for Peace to the facilitator in October and November 2004; Uribe went so far as to suggest that the Mexican government had adopted the position of the Colombian government. These declarations generated more mistrust. Two other developments in late December and early January—the government’s extradition to the United States of FARC Commander “Simón Trinidad” and the arrest in Caracas of mid-level FARC commander Rodrigo Granda—created more fear about the future of the talks.³

Throughout this time, however, we took steps to convince the Colombian government to adopt the necessary measures to permit a meeting in Mexico between COCE representatives and the facilitator. We also attempted to persuade the ELN that its refusal to accept a cessation of hostilities would lead to a dead end in the talks. We maintained contact with the Catholic Church, the Civilian Facilitating Commission, and the Group of Friends, which both privately and publicly called on the parties to be more flexible. Other international actors made this same appeal.

Assuming a more active role, the Mexican facili-

tator worked with Commander Galán to devise different formulas by which the ELN could satisfy the demands of the Colombian government. On December 10, 2004, for example, we asked the Central Command if it would be willing to commit to refraining from carrying out “acts of war” while the meeting was taking place. We also asked them if, during the meeting with the facilitator, they would be willing to discuss the possibility of a cease-fire and a cessation of hostilities. And we asked them whether they would agree to meet at a location in Mexico that would not be disclosed to the press or to other parties. In essence, we were exploring whether the ELN would accept a meeting with a relatively limited agenda and conditions. We also wanted to make the meeting appealing to the government, by dealing with its priorities. We believed that under the proposed conditions, the meeting would not arouse government suspicions that the ELN was using the opportunity solely to reposition itself before national and international public opinion. The Central Command’s letter of January 12, 2005, (mentioned above) was a response to these suggestions.

The ELN’s response demonstrated significant flexibility. Yet it was also clear that its commitment to “avoid incidents that could jeopardize the success of the meeting” did not go far enough to assuage the government’s concerns. Hence, on January 17, 2005, the facilitator and Commander Galán submitted to COCE a document entitled “Itinerary for an Eventual Meeting in Mexico between the COCE and the Facilitator.”⁴ The document proposed that the COCE communicate to the Mexican representative its “complete willingness to refrain from carrying out acts of violence during the course of the meeting so as to not disrupt it, [without] renounc[ing] the legitimate right to self-defense if attacked.” The key to the letter was the replacement of the phrase “to avoid incidents that can disrupt the success of the meeting” with the phrase “to refrain from acts of violence during the course of the meeting.” The Mexican government would then simply inform the Colombian government that, as a reciprocal commitment (that is, from the beginning to the conclusion of the meeting), the Colombian gov-

ernment would suspend military operations against the ELN.

The itinerary proposed, moreover, that that agenda include an evaluation of the exploratory phase of the dialogue and an analysis of the future direction of the process, based on the public positions of the two parties. It also mentioned the possibility of an extension of the period during which the ELN would maintain its commitment to refrain from acts of violence, in case the Mexico meeting consolidated the possibilities for further dialogue.

High Commissioner Restrepo was enthusiastic about the proposal. He stated that it would be no problem for the government to adopt the following measures to make the meeting possible: a) the suspension of arrest warrants for COCE members attending the meeting; b) the suspension of the petitions filed with Interpol for the arrest of these same individuals; c) authorization for Francisco Galán to attend the meeting; and d) the granting of the necessary security guarantees.

The ELN Central Command responded to the suggestions in the itinerary on January 24, 2005. The unpublished letter was addressed to the facilitator and stated:

“We have closely examined your proposal. We view it favorably and consider that it can make it possible to hold the meeting to which we have invited you.

We will refer directly to the points you outline.

1. *The paragraph that you suggest we change, so that the text is more objective and acceptable to*

The government’s proposal represented an important concession, in that it mentioned the possibility of a temporary cease-fire; this position was certainly different than its earlier insistence on an indefinite suspension of hostilities, analogous to the one declared in principle by the paramilitaries.... The ELN’s positions also gradually became more flexible.



all, should read: ‘on our part there is a complete willingness to avoid any and all military actions during the course of the meeting so that it is not disrupted, but we cannot renounce our legitimate right to self-defense if we are attacked during that time.’

2. *We agree with what you propose: ‘Naturally, as a reciprocal commitment during the same time, and with previously agreed upon dates for the meeting’s beginning and end, the government would suspend its military operations against the ELN.’*
3. *The continuation of this suspension of military actions is contingent on a cease-fire agreement. We cannot continue without rigorous verification that such a suspension is actually taking place. We believe that the issue of a cease-fire is a subject for the negotiating table and not for the facilitator.*
4. *The agenda should have as its essential feature an evaluation of this exploratory process, an analysis of the existing difficulties, and an exploration of ways to overcome these difficulties, in order to make a dialogue between the ELN and the Colombian government possible.”*

Thus, after months of work, we had an agreement. To be sure, it was a triangular accord mediated by the facilitator. But the accord without a doubt constituted a set of agreements between the ELN and the Colombian government.

The letter indicated that the Central Command’s position had shifted in order to satisfy the government’s concerns. There was still doubt as to whether the suspension of “military actions” would include the so-called “retentions”—a nonnegotiable demand of the Uribe administration. Following Commander Galan’s interpretation that such a reading was possible, we indicated that we would suggest to the government that it not demand explicit lan-

guage on this matter. Instead, we proposed that when the government announced publicly its willingness to hold a meeting, it also would make clear its understanding that the ELN’s commitment included the suspension of kidnappings. Clearly, the government would not agree with the ELN’s statement regarding an eventual extension of the cessation of hostilities, but we felt that the government could overlook this discrepancy.

With this hope in mind, we met on January 28, 2005, with the High Commissioner for Peace. In a matter of hours, he canvassed the country’s highest authorities. After this consultation, he accepted the formula for the suspension of “military actions” as well as the facilitator’s suggestion with respect to kidnappings. He allowed, at least for the moment, that it was not necessary to work out an agreement concerning an extension of the cessation of hostilities. He merely suggested that, for the purpose of reciprocity, the language concerning the government’s obligations to suspend operations against the ELN parallel the language and terms of the COCE’s own commitment.

Thus, after months of work, we had an agreement. To be sure, it was a triangular accord mediated by the facilitator. But the accord without a doubt constituted a set of agreements between the ELN and the Colombian government. Therein lay their importance. The next step was to suggest ways to formalize the agreements. With this goal in mind, we met with Commander Francisco Galán on January 29, 2005.

Commander Galán’s report to the Central Command, which we wrote jointly, noted the government’s position. The report’s operative portions stated that:

A. The Central Command should send a letter with the following principal elements:

1. *In accordance with the January 12 and January 24 communiqués sent by the COCE to the facilitator, the ELN reiterates its commitment to the government of Mexico—and asks that it make this commitment known to the Colombian government—that, to make it possible for COCE representatives and the facilitator to meet in*

Mexican territory, the ELN is completely willing to do everything possible to avoid military actions during the course of that meeting, so as not to disrupt it. But the ELN cannot renounce its legitimate right to self-defense if it is attacked during that period.

2. *Naturally, the Central Command would expect that, in reciprocity, the government would demonstrate its complete willingness to avoid taking military actions against the ELN during the meeting, except in the event that its forces were attacked.*
3. *The agenda for the meeting with the facilitator would seek to evaluate this exploratory process, analyze existing difficulties, and seek solutions to these difficulties, in order to make a dialogue between the ELN and the Colombian government possible.*

B. As soon as the facilitator receives the letter from the COCE, it will deliver it to the Colombian government, which will immediately make public its commitment to adopt the measures necessary for the meeting to take place.”

I should add that both Commander Galán and I shared the document with High Commissioner for Peace Restrepo as it was being drafted. It thus seemed to all of us—the government, the ELN, and the facilitator—that we had finally reached an understanding.

Nonetheless, on January 31, 2005, Commander Galán asked me to travel to Itagüí immediately to discuss some clarifications requested by the COCE. The next day, the ELN sent a letter signed by the Central Command, stating the following:

We feel obliged to raise a number of questions regarding what you stated to Francisco [Galán]:

1. *You ask us to write a letter to the Mexican government, and then tell us what we must say in that letter. We find this request rather disrespectful. You also leave the impression that your*

government learned only today of what we have been working on for months.

2. *You also ask that we adopt one of your suggestions as our own, making it seem as if we have asked the Colombian government for reciprocity, when you are the one who formulated this proposal.*
3. *We do not understand how you can ask us for a letter to the Mexican government, which would immediately be delivered to the Colombian government, which would then “make public its commitment to adopt the measures necessary for a meeting to take place.” Only then would the letter be delivered to your government. Pardon our frankness, but it seems that the facilitator is acting as if he were the Colombian government, and as if the Colombian government were facilitating the meeting between the Central Command and the Mexican facilitator.*
4. *In previous letters you asked us to maintain complete confidentiality and discretion with respect to the media. You even proposed that the meeting be confidential and that the media be absent. But now, even before the Mexican government knows the content of the letter you have requested, you are proposing that the Colombian government speak publicly about it. So that we fully understand each other, it is very important to us to hear your views on these matters.*

How should this letter be interpreted? The suggestions formulated only two days before did not include anything that had not been the subject of previous communications...The “Itinerary” already envisioned that the COCE would send a letter to the facilitator expressing its commitment to the Mexican government to suspend acts of violence, a commitment about which the facilitator was to inform the Colombian government. At one point, this proposal did not bother the Central Command. Why, then, did the suggestion that the ELN send a letter containing these elements subsequently seem “rather disrespectful?” Doesn’t the statement, “you ask us to write a letter to the



Mexican government, and then tell us what we must say in that letter” appear as a deliberate attempt to take our suggestion out of context? Why did the COCE air its concerns in a formal letter, knowing that it was likely to be made public? If this was a genuine attempt to clear up misunderstandings, then why did the COCE not communicate its concerns through Commander Galán, so that they could be resolved through that very channel?

We firmly believe, for reasons about which we can only speculate, that the ELN decided to back out of the process of rapprochement with the government. And to justify this move, it chose to blame the facilitator.

Due to its highly inappropriate tone, the COCE’s letter deserved an energetic response from the Mexican representative, even at the risk of ending the facilitation effort. We thus made a formal request that the letter be withdrawn, and asked for a conversation via walkie-talkie with Commander Antonio García, in order to clear up any possible misunderstandings.

That conversation took place on February 4, 2005. The Mexican representative explained in detail why the COCE’s January 31 letter was unacceptable. Following Commander García’s insistence on discussing the specifics of that letter, the facilitator gave detailed responses to each of the COCE’s supposed concerns. Because we wanted to maintain a conciliatory tone, we stated that we could not exclude the possibility that the interpretations contained in the letter “could be the product of the limitations of our form of communication, given that the dialogue between the facilitator and the COCE had never been direct and immediate, and in the best of cases, had taken place through letters.”

The facilitator also stated that the letter of January 31 had implications beyond the issue of possible misunderstandings. The letter seemed to express a deep dissatisfaction with the work of the Mexican representative. This dissatisfaction, moreover, only made sense if the ELN expected that the actions of the Mexican government would take place within parameters that were completely different from those that had been established for our work. The facilitator gave a detailed explanation of

We firmly believe, for reasons about which we can only speculate, that the ELN decided to back out of the process of rapprochement with the government. And to justify this move, it chose to blame the facilitator.

the criteria of objectivity, impartiality, and confidentiality that had guided our work.

Our points of view aside, Commander García refused to withdraw the letter. He said it would serve as a document for internal reference and that the ELN had no interest in publishing it. And, in response to our indication that it was not certain given the circumstances that the Mexican government would continue to play the role of facilitator, the ELN commander stated that—although he hoped we would continue our work—the COCE had yet to receive an apology from the Mexican representative.

It was not easy for the Mexican Foreign Ministry to decide what to do. Continuing under these conditions ran the risk that the Central Command would no longer engage in the process with the respect and consideration due a sovereign government. At the same time, we did recognize that it was not a simple matter for Commander García to accede to the facilitator’s request during the February 4 conversation via walkie-talkie; anyone who wanted to could have listened in on it. Nevertheless, it was difficult to explain why our private request through Commander Galán had not been considered from the outset. The absence of any other conciliatory gesture by the ELN was also difficult to explain, notwithstanding the messages received through official channels in the hours that followed. The political climate deteriorated even further after President Uribe made a public statement in which he described ELN militants as “profoundly arrogant, messianic, fundamentalist and schematic in their discourse—cowards at the moment of truth...despite their denials, they do not renounce drugs, nor do they renounce the FARC, whom they fear.” Later, President Uribe referred to Commander García as “a saboteur of peace.”

These difficulties aside, and following an explicit request from the Colombian government, the Mexican team decided to continue its efforts. However, under orders from the Foreign Ministry, the facilitator sent a letter on February 16, 2005, to the Central Command thoroughly explaining the work that had been carried out since September, and again outlining the reasons that the January 31 letter and the COCE's refusal to withdraw it were unacceptable. The letter also stated that it was up to the ELN to decide whether the facilitator should continue his work and whether the conditions existed to advance the process of rapprochement. The letter demanded an unequivocal response to the following questions:

- A. *Did the COCE accept and agree with the parameters within which the Mexican facilitator carried out his work?*
- B. *Did the COCE agree that the relationship between the ELN and the facilitator should be characterized by the respect and consideration owed a sovereign government?*
- C. *Was it possible to advance the process of rapprochement based on the January 29 proposals? Misunderstandings aside, did the proposals themselves give rise to any core concerns that the Central Command did not wish to make explicit? Did the January 31 letter [from the COCE] represent a change of position?*

The Mexican representative did not release this letter to any third party, but the Colombian government, the Group of Friends, and the Civilian Facilitating Commission were duly informed of its contents. The Civilian Facilitating Commission itself had received a February 18 invitation from the ELN to “creatively project its facilitation work as a plural endeavor in the national and international arenas.” Several days later, the COCE even expressed its desire that the Commission be present at an eventual meeting with the Mexican representative. We thus were back to the positions set forth in June 2004.

The ELN did not respond to our letter until March 2, 2005, and did so verbally through Commander

Galán. In its reply, the Central Command asked that Mexican facilitation continue. The COCE indicated that the letter of January 31 was the product of a misunderstanding, and stated that it recognized and valued the ways that the facilitator carried out his work. Nevertheless, the COCE did not respond to the deeper question: did the letter of January 31 represent or not a change of position with respect to the agreements reached two days earlier.

The conversations with Commander Galán made clear that the ELN had, in fact, changed its position. The principal modifications had to do, first, with the ELN's desire to include other actors—not just the COCE and the Mexican facilitator but others such as the Civilian Facilitating Commission—in the meeting in Mexico. Second, the ELN would not include kidnappings as part of the suspension of military activities, but rather, only attacks against the armed forces and the country's infrastructure.

As could have been expected, the High Commissioner for Peace was far from pleased. On March 5, 2005, he sent a letter to the Mexican representative stating the following:

- A. *The unilateral change in the agreed upon format for the meeting in Mexico ignored the January 29 agreement and seemed to indicate that there will be two parallel negotiating tables—one with Mexico and one with those that the ELN chooses to accompany the meeting.*
- B. *The decision to exclude kidnapping from the military actions that the ELN was to suspend before the meeting, as well as changes leading to the establishment of a parallel agenda about which the Colombian government was not informed, demonstrated the lack of a serious and constructive attitude on the part of the ELN.*
- C. *It was necessary to return to the proposals of January 29, making clear the Colombian government's non-negotiable position that the cessation of military actions by the ELN included the suspension of actions against the security forces, the nation's economic infrastructure, and civil society. For this reason, the suspension of kidnappings was indispensable.*



D. If the ELN refused to return to a discussion of the January 29 proposal that was agreed to with Francisco Galán, the government would see that the conditions for initiating a truthful, serious, and useful dialogue for national peace do not exist, and would seek to protect Colombians from yet another round of frustration.

On March 7, 2005, the facilitator delivered a copy of the High Commissioner's letter to Commander Galán, informing him, at the request of the Colombian government, that if there were no response within ten days, the government would make the letter public.

THE COLLAPSE OF THE NEGOTIATIONS

The ten days came and went, with no response from the guerrillas. But the government decided not to publish its March 5, 2005, letter to the facilitator. Instead, an aide to the High Commissioner for Peace, General Eduardo Herrera, met personally with Francisco Galán at the Itagüí prison between March 14 and March 18. These meetings raised the possibility of a direct meeting in Mexico between the Central Command and the Colombian government. This was to mark the culmination of the exploratory phase of the dialogue and would open the way for ongoing facilitation. No agreement, however, was reached on the issue of kidnappings.

In this context of this back-and-forth, the Central Command sent a message on March 27, 2005, to the presidents of Brazil, Venezuela, and Spain, who were to meet with President Uribe in Guyana City two days later. The message asked these leaders to look favorably upon the process of rapprochement between the ELN and the Colombian government. The message referred to "the Colombian conflict's important implications for the destabilization of the region," and stated that "the absence of a political solution to the conflict surely merits analysis and consideration during the presidents' meeting in Guyana City."

During the presidential summit on March 29, President Uribe—not knowing that his remarks

were being broadcast live by the media, and believing that his words were being heard only by his colleagues and their delegations—referred to the process of rapprochement with the ELN. He recounted a telephone conversation he had had the previous day with Francisco Galán concerning a possible meeting in Mexico between the COCE and the Colombian government, and made public the key point of disagreement: the ELN's refusal to suspend kidnappings.

Commander García's response came in an interview appearing in the Colombian daily *El Colombiano* on April 4, 2005. He reiterated the ELN's refusal to suspend "retentions," because it needed to finance its social and political activities and financially support its men. García also said that President Uribe's breach of the dialogue's confidentiality in Guyana City had hardened the positions of the two parties.

Notwithstanding García's comments, the Brazilian, Venezuelan, and Spanish ambassadors to Colombia were directed by their respective presidents to meet with Commander Galán in Itagüí, to deliver a message to the ELN. That meeting took place on April 8, 2005. The ambassadors underscored the need for a cessation of hostilities, including a suspension of kidnappings, in order to make a meeting between the Colombian government and the ELN possible. The ambassadors also expressed their support for the Mexican facilitation effort.

On April 12, 2005, we met yet again with Commander Francisco Galán. The idea was to give continuity to the process of rapprochement. We jointly drafted a query for consideration by the COCE: was it possible that the ELN would reconsider its publicly-stated position regarding the suspension of kidnappings, in exchange for some concession or political gesture by the government? We mentioned some examples of possible concessions, including the opening of parallel spaces for political dialogue with civil society and the international community at the time of the meeting between the ELN and the Colombian government. Another example was the possible judicial review of legal cases currently open or already settled against a certain number of ELN militants.

The ELN gave no response to the query. Instead, on April 18, 2005, it made public a communiqué dated the previous day. As evidence that the Mexican government was not prepared to serve as the facilitator of the peace process in Colombia, it cited, among other things, Mexico's vote against Cuba at the annual meeting of the United Nation's Human Rights Commission [in Geneva].⁵ The communiqué added that "the ELN... reaffirms its respect for the work of Ambassador Valencia and understands that the policies of his government are what prevent him from continuing his work as facilitator."

In a press release that same day, the Mexican Foreign Ministry announced the end of its facilitation effort.

The Colombian government simultaneously expressed its gratitude for the efforts of the Mexican government, and stated that "the terrorist ELN's reasons for suspending Mexico's fraternal cooperation reflect the offensive, arrogant, and mendacious attitude of this group, which refuses to suspend the terrorist practice of kidnapping in order to initiate a peace process."

SOME TENTATIVE CONCLUSIONS

In light of what is described above, I offer some tentative conclusions.

- It would appear that, in principle, the ELN was never willing to adopt a potentially irreversible measure like a cessation of hostilities. Rather, the ELN's objective—through the attempted rapprochement with the Colombia government—had more to do with reestablishing the political spaces for dialogue that it had built nationally and internationally for more than a decade.
- The ELN clearly backed out of the agreements reached on January 29, 2005, but it is not possible to say with certainty whether this decision was influenced by third parties. Some speculate that the FARC had a decisive influence. If this is true, then one has to doubt the possibility for a separate dialogue with the ELN that, in practice, would isolate the more powerful guerrilla organization.
- The disagreements that came to light regarding the suspension of kidnapping came at a high political cost to the ELN. This cost would have been even greater had the negotiations continued. This explains the guerrilla organization's decision to suspend the process, thereby crippling the facilitation effort.
- A resumption of dialogue is not likely to be viable during this term of the Uribe administration, despite a call by the government to do just that. In the eyes of the ELN, new contacts would contribute Uribe's reelection.
- As long as the government is unwilling to allow the ELN to recover political space, the viability of international facilitation in future mediations is doubtful. Thus, it would appear that the Catholic Church could be called upon to facilitate, at least initially.
- Finally, it is quite clear that communication with Commander Francisco Galán is not sufficient for the process to advance. What is required instead is direct dialogue with the Central Command.

Ambassador Andrés Valencia Benavides entered the Mexican Foreign Service in 1973. Since that time, he has served in a number of diplomatic posts, including Ambassador to the Organization of American States, Consul General in Atlanta, Georgia, Director of Bilateral Affairs in the Foreign Ministry, Ambassador to Colombia, and Ambassador to Israel.



Notes

1. The *Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional*, Armed Forces of National Liberation. [Ed.]

2. Demobilization talks between the Colombian government and the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (United Self-Defense Forces), the principal paramilitary coalition, formally opened in a safe haven centered on the town of Santa Fe de Ralito, Córdoba, in July 2003. One of the thorniest issues in the talks involved the conditions under which paramilitary leaders accused of major human rights violations or drug trafficking would demobilize. According to taped conversations leaked to the media, High Commissioner for Peace Luis Carlos Restrepo told AUC leaders that “homicides are being committed that compromise those who are inside the [safe haven]. It is a matter which we have handled very carefully to avoid a public scandal which would harm us.” Andrew Selsky, “Tapes on Colombian Killings Leaked,” Associated Press, September 28, 2004. [Ed.]

3. FARC leader Rafael Palermo, “Simón Trinidad,” was captured in Ecuador in January 2004 and subsequently extradited to the United States on drug trafficking charges.

In January 2005, the Venezuelan government accused Colombian authorities of bribing Venezuelan National Guardsmen to capture Rodrigo Granda, a senior FARC official living openly in Caracas, and deliver him to police authorities in Colombia. Diplomatic relations between the two neighbors deteriorated sharply, with Venezuela claiming that Colombia had violated its sovereignty and Colombia arguing that Venezuela sheltered guerrilla operatives and had ignored numerous international arrest warrants for Granda. The dispute escalated when Venezuela withdrew its ambassador from Bogotá and suspended agreements with Colombia, partially closing the border to bilateral commerce. Pressed by leaders in Brazil, Cuba, and Peru, President Uribe and Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela reconciled their differences in mid-February 2005. [Ed.]

4. This document was contained in a report of the ELN Commissioner to the organization’s senior leadership.

5. By a margin of 21 to 17, with 15 abstentions, the Human Rights Commission voted to ask a personal representative of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to report on the human rights situation in Cuba. Among the countries voting in favor of the resolution were the United States, Canada, Costa Rica, France, Guatemala, Honduras, Italy, and Japan, in addition to Mexico. Among the countries abstaining were Argentina, Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Paraguay, and Peru. [Ed.]

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