

COLOMBIA

The Transformation of a Country

CLAUDIA TURBAY
AMBASSAOR OF COLOMBIA TO SWITZERLAND
AUGUST 24,2010 LAUSANNE
AUGUST 25, ZURICH

COLOMBIA: The Transformation of a Country

Opening Statements by HE Mrs. Claudia Turbay Ambassador of Colombia to Switzerland

I am grateful for this invitation of the Latin American Chamber of Commerce, as well as for those of you, who are today, here with us. I am grateful, too, for the support given by Osec to this event. I am happy to share this space with our good friends from Peru and the other speaker participants. We always welcome these opportunities to establish a direct and friendly dialogue with qualified audiences when it refers to provide information about economic climate and business opportunities in our country.

I am here to deliver a simple, straight message: Why Colombia? Let me give you some information and fast facts: Colombia is global, is a country with a sound and stable economy, where incentives and rules are well respected. Our country has transformed from a slow and static economy to be a player in the interdependent economy.

We were lucky to have during the past eight years as head of State, a magnificent promoter of our Country, President Alvaro Uribe, who was, as the description on information sheet of this seminar says, a Pro- market economic policies, who understood the importance of trade, of an incentivised business community, of the international markets and foreign investment among others.

Under his direction our economy grew during his two governments period, (2002 – 2010) to improve every single indicator, included and specially those of domestic security: For him, Trade, Investment together with social responsibility was one of the main focuses of his government.

The good news that I have to communicate to you is that although our new government which has been in office only for two weeks ago, the strategy and policy orientation of President Juan Manuel Santos goes in exactly the same direction.

Some information that you would like to have, I guess, is that Colombia is applying each time, more and more, the requirements of Doing Business Right, where the human and environmental factors go first. Taking into consideration our environment and climate change problems, we understand that we are impacting our economy, our energy consumption, and respecting life. We are certainly promoting Clean Production and Fair Trade where, natural and human resources are both, top priorities.

Other piece of information I wish to share with you is that we are also, focusing into Science and Technology as an important mean to grow, to improve our competitiveness and close the gap with the most developed countries. Colombia is willing to be among the best world economic players. We are working for that.

We are proud to tell you that our efforts show good results, and those are reported by International Institutions, by businessmen themselves. I will refer today to the well known World Bank report "Doing Business" 2009, which ranked Colombia as the best Latin American Business Climate. Together with that, we have been recognized as one of the first ten world economies that have undergone the many and necessary reforms to modernize our business and investment regulations.

COLOMBIA: The Transformation of a Country

Opening Statements by HE Mrs. Claudia Turbay Ambassador of Colombia to Switzerland

Colombia holds the fifth place in the Doing Business Report, for its policy on Foreign Investment Protection. We have built up, and will keep it as the main objective in our relationship with investors: Confidence. Colombia is a country we all can trust and rely on.

Large-scale business as well as small ones has the country regulatory support, where private-public alliance is doing well. We are working to incentivise private sector initiatives, foreign investment, to decrease poverty and unemployment and to formalize small businesses.

Actually President Santos Government already introduced the Law which will allow the recognition, formalization and creation altogether of 2.5 million new jobs. It is a package of a staggered program that covers special exemptions, inclusion into Social benefits and training.

We still have difficulties and challenges as well: we have to keep improving, which in Colombia is a daily task, a daily commitment, because we have a hard working culture.

Let me tell you and celebrate the good bilateral relationship that Switzerland and Colombia holds. We have agreements that allow us a fast flowing relation: EFTA. This trade agreement was already approved by our parliaments, the Swiss and the Colombian one. Now, we are only waiting, as a legal formality, the acceptance from the Colombian Constitutional Court, and sooner than later, we will be enforcing it. And it will be disposable to enjoy its benefits.

We also count with the agreement on Double Taxation, Investment Promotion and Protection one, the Agreement on Protection of Cultural Properties, and are also close to sign the Judicial Cooperation Agreement.

As you perhaps know, we are benefiting two excellent cooperation programs with Switzerland, one is economic oriented with SECO which spends around 50 mm CHF and the other, with COSUDE which is a four year plan, Humanitarian oriented, and spends approximately 8 millions CHF a year.

We are happy to stress, that we have always had a very significant Swiss presence in Colombia throughout its strong and representative community, we celebrated two years ago our first one hundred years of relationship. We consider that our best asset in this relationship is the Human asset.

There are also several Swiss investing companies (in construction, precision instruments, banking, insurance, pharmaceutical, agribusiness, food, clean water and environmental technologies, and energy and mining sectors among other) which have always been and will always be welcomed. We celebrated April, this year the first Latin American “Davos” conference which was about “new partners for a sustainable recuperation”. It was a great success. At that time , we could showed and offered information on investments and business opportunities , in many different sectors, in which Colombia will go Global, as we expect it to be done with all of you today.

Many thanks for your attention.