

Remarks  
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State  
Cucuta, Colombia  
April 14, 2019

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**SECRETARY POMPEO:** Good evening. It's truly an honor to be here with you, President Duque. I want to commend your government and the people of Colombia for the support that you've offered to the Venezuelans in their true hour of need. The United States and freedom-loving nations around the world stand by you.

I also want to thank Interim President Juan Guaido and his ambassador to Colombia, Humberto Calderon, and his representative to the Lima Group, Julio Borges. The ambassador and Julio Borges were here today. Thank you for joining us.

And I want to thank all the people who made my visit possible. I want to thank the workers at the Migration Transition Assistance Center and here at *Tienditas* at the warehouse. It was today incredibly moving to walk on that bridge and to witness the important work that's being done to address the enormous humanitarian crisis. It's a special day, too, because this is Palm Sunday. To see the need, to see the hurt in these people's eyes on this important day, was truly something.

To date, 3.4 million Venezuelans have fled their country. By the end of the year, that figure will exceed 5 million. They include people like I saw today. They include people like Geraldine, a Venezuelan mother who has crossed the border now roughly 20 times. She is torn; she is unwilling to abandon her family and friends, but also unable to provide for them in her home country. So Geraldine goes back and forth across the bridge, across the border. She leaves Venezuela seeking medicine for her children. She's gone searching for simple items, items like medicine, like diapers, that which under normal circumstances in any normal country would be readily available, but she can no longer find them in Venezuela. She finds them here, here in Colombia, and she can count on community kitchens here in Colombia to provide meals for her and for her children every single time that she passes through.

Geraldine's story, sadly, isn't unique. We saw that today. Cucuta is just their first step for many. It's a long journey for these Venezuelans. These *caminantes* travel hundreds of miles on foot in Colombia and throughout the region. And despite the risks that they face and the love they retain for Venezuela, they truly feel like they have no choice.

Their collective plight is why the United States since 2017 has provided \$213 million in humanitarian assistance, and why just this past Wednesday Vice President Pence announced approximately \$60 million in additional aid and assistance. This funding provides shelter, safe food and drinking water, protection against violence and exploitation, and access to work and education opportunities.

But actually getting this aid into Venezuela is a whole 'nother story, because Nicolas Maduro refused to accept it. He refuses to allow this aid to get across. To paraphrase a president who faced similar circumstances: Mr. Maduro, open these bridges, open these borders. You can end this today. I hope that you care. I hope that you will care enough when you see the horror, when you see the tragedy, to change your ways and to leave your country.

Colombia and the United States want a better future for the Venezuelan people under the leadership of Interim President Guaido and the democratically elected National Assembly. There is a plan in place for free and fair elections inside of Venezuela and for a return to private sector-led growth, for a restoration of normal life and economic opportunity and prosperity inside of Venezuela.

But before these things happen, Maduro's usurpation must end. All Venezuelans and the world should reject the illegitimate authoritarian rule imposed on the Venezuelan people, including the Venezuelan military leadership. The United States will continue to utilize every economic and political means at our disposal to help the Venezuelan people. Using sanctions, visa revocations, and other means, we pledge to hold the regime and those propping it up accountable for their corruption and their repression of democracy.

We are deeply aware of the recent intimidation tactics used by the Maduro regime this past Thursday. Maduro should know we are watching, and our support will not waiver. Democratic actors in Venezuela will not be deterred. And as I said on this trip to the Chilean, Peruvian, and Paraguayan partners this week, we are grateful for the leadership of our South American friends and allies. They have shown tremendous energy to help ordinary Venezuelans who want nothing more than democracy and prosperity in their own country.

Thank you, President Duque, for your commitment to restoring democracy in Venezuela. And thank you, too, Mr. President, for your cooperation on regional issues like counternarcotics and regional security. The United States will continue to work with you to stem the problem of coca production that you inherited. We know what we must do, and the United States will do its part to reduce the demand for illegal drugs in our own country. But it's also very important to acknowledge that our unique, important bilateral relationship goes far beyond fighting common foes. It can be seen only – this can be seen most clearly through the promotion of trade and trade agreements and economic contacts – commitments between our two nations.

Thank you, Mr. President, and thank you to the Colombian people for your friendship with the United States of America. *Muchas gracias.*

(Applause.)

**PRESIDENT DUQUE:** (Via interpreter) Thank you very much for your words, for your visit, for your friendship with Colombia. It has been a pleasure having you again in our country. I would like to express that there is one common cause of the countries of his hemisphere, the countries that gave life to the inter-American system, and it's the defense, (inaudible) defense of democratic principles. That's why in 2001 we all signed the Inter-American Democratic Charter so that our – in our region we would never again have the terrible consequences of dictatorship.

And what joins us, what unites us with the Venezuelan people, is many causes. One of them is defending democracy, re-establishing the full exercise of freedoms, and the constitutional reconstruction of that country. We are also united by a binational brotherhood, and as you can see, Secretary Pompeo, Colombia has received over a million migrants in our territory with fraternity, of course. They are fleeing from the brutal dictatorship, hungry, with diseases. And here, amidst our difficulties and amidst our fiscal restrictions, tax restrictions, we have been giving them our love and care and attention.

Today I want to celebrate that once again our commitment is ratified, the commitment between our countries, with your presence here today to do all necessary efforts to re-establish democracy, freedom, and institutional order in Venezuela. Today also we would like to express that what was achieved this week within the OAS is very important by accepting the representation of President Guaido, and tomorrow when a group meeting of the Lima Group is held we will again, once again, emphasize that all sanctions – political sanctions, economic sanctions, and diplomatic sanctions – must be used to isolate the dictatorship and to allow for transition in Venezuela.

I would like to tell you, Secretary Pompeo, that the cause has also been a very personal cause to me for over six years now. When I was senator of the republic, I submitted to congress what was back then a proposal to request the freedom of political prisoners. I then denounced Nicolas Maduro vis-a-vis the International Criminal Court with support of Chilean and Colombian senators. Today we have nine heads of states supporting our cause, and I also hope that a trial is opened against Nicolas Maduro so that he is convicted for the terrible crimes that he has committed.

There is a third element nonetheless, which is humanitarian aid. Colombia told the world that we are willing to receive humanitarian aid, to warehouse it and to provide logistics, and to allow for it to be transported to Venezuela by Venezuelan people who want to take this to their families. The past February the world was able to see the brutalities by the regime to avoid that such aid was able to save lives. And despite the fact that they tried to hinder this, what occurred was a moral and ethic defeat in the eyes of the world. And this allows us all to continue with this task because it's a moral duty to re-establish democracy in Venezuela.

Your presence here ratifies the commitment of the countries that share this vision, and I also would like to express, Mr. Secretary, that Colombia and the United States have had a long-lasting relationship, a relationship in which there are many topics that bring us together. And without any doubt, the fight against terrorism, the fight against narcotics, has always been present there. You know that between 2012 and the moment in which I took over, we saw an exponential growth of illegal crops, of less than 60,000 hectares to over 200,000 hectares.

In addition, the Colombian people elected me to tackle that phenomenon, and since August 7 and to date we have done nothing but tackle this cause, because it's our moral duty and our commitment with the Colombian people, but it is also a shared work, as you have very well said. And we hope to continue working hand-in-hand to dismantle all these cartels that affect the populations of our countries.

I also believe, Mr. Secretary, that the tasks ahead in that front are many, but we must continue building based on trust this joint effort, because that's what this is about. From the side of demand, from the side of supply, from the side of cartels and money laundering, both countries produce the results required because it is a common threat. It is also important to say that our country's agenda goes beyond facing common enemies. It is based on our values. We have a commercial agenda. We have a science and technology agenda, entrepreneurship, culture, energy, which is very broad, and we ratified that today also with your visit, Mr. Secretary.

Today we are giving a clear message to the Venezuelan people: We are with you to defeat dictatorship. We are with you for you to recover your freedom. And we also want to convey a message to the Colombian people, and the message is that the United States and Colombia in this joint effort and this effort of co-responsibility will continue working to defeat narcotics, terrorism. And we also tell the Colombian people that our duty is to continue strengthening this relationship in a more innovative agenda of trade strategies in the agrarian sector of supporting production chains, and today with your presence this is very evident. Thank you very much. Mr. Secretary.

(Applause.)