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CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN
THE U.S.-COLOMBIA RELATIONSHIP

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Introduction and Moderator:

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Featured Speaker:

FEDERICO GUTIÉRREZ ZULUAGA
Mayor
City of Medellin, Colombia

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. O'HANLON: Good morning, everyone, and welcome to Brookings. I'm Mike O'Hanlon with the Foreign Policy program. On behalf of a number of my colleagues here, who have been fascinated and interested in Colombia, and Medellin in particular, for a number of years, I'd like to welcome you and most of all welcome the Mayor of Medellin Colombia, Federico Gutiérrez, to Brookings.

It's a great honor for us to have the Mayor her today. He has a presentation that will begin the morning's proceedings, after I give a brief introduction, and then we'll have a little bit of discussion, he and I, and then time for your questions, all in the space of 60 minutes and all with sequential translation. So it will be an experiment, but it will be great. And there will be some fascinating presentation materials the Mayor will show in just a few minutes when I give him the floor.

Federico Gutiérrez is a native son of Medellin. He is passionate about his City, he is Mayor there since last year in a term that runs three years, he has been recognized as one of the young stars of Colombia. He's been involved in the City Council now for 13 years, and other kinds of activity in Medellin going back to that period in his late 20s. He's a graduate of University in Medellin with a degree in civil engineering. He's also the first Mayor of Medellin ever to be elected as part of citizen's movement rather than a political party. The movement *Creemos*, which I'm sure he'll be talking more about in just a few minutes.

Let me just add one more broad word about Medellin and Colombia and how much of an honor it is for us at Brookings to be hosting an event on these subjects. And I think I'll try to link it in to where we are also in our American political transition. I got to know Colombia reasonably well, or at least better than I had before, through Ambassador Juan Carlos Pinzón Bueno, who is now the Colombian Ambassador to the United States, who had been the Defense Minister. And when he was Defense Minister, he and then General Kelly at Southern Command created a very, very vigorous U.S.-Colombia working group, which involved a lot of former commanders and current Colombian officials. And we met routinely over a period of two or three years trying to foster an even greater U.S.-Colombia alliance and partnership, knowing how far this alliance had already come, that it was arguably our most important and closest in the entire hemisphere south of the border, and that there was so much we could do together. Colombia, as you know, has made remarkable strides and has recently concluded a peace agreement as

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well with the FARC, but I think Medellin, as you'll hear today, has made even greater strides than Colombia writ large. And while Colombia still faces challenges, even though it has brought its violence rates down dramatically, fostered this peace agreement, enjoyed economic growth in recent years, Colombia still has of course, like many of us, including this country, great challenges ahead and high levels of ongoing violence. But even as the Colombian levels of insecurity and crime have plateaued perhaps at a much lower but still high level, Medellin has continued to make enormous progress.

I'm just going to add one word here in closing about what I described in a forthcoming publication that we've done with General Ray Odierno, the former Army Chief of Staff, we describe as the Medellin miracle because not only did Medellin go after Pablo Escobar and some of the big drug kingpins in the 1990s and then follow through with Plan Colombia as the rest of the country did as well in the early 2000s, but it has continued remarkable progress since that time under people like Mayor Gaviria and now Mayor Gutiérrez in a wide range of security initiatives and also economic development and community development initiatives. Today -- and I'll finish on this point -- the violence rate in Colombia, in Medellin in particular, is only five percent of what it was a quarter century ago. It's been reduced. The murder rate has been reduced by 95 percent in Medellin. And this is not just a success for security forces, it's also a success for political and economic leadership and what the City has been able to accomplish writ large. Beth Pearce and I were there in August as part of our research for this projects we've been doing with General Odierno, had a remarkable experience and were incredibly impressed by the City.

So thank you for letting me indulge in a little bit of gushing about Colombia and about the U.S.-Colombia relationship. I think it is important to know that Secretary of Homeland Security Kelly is passionate about this country as well, and this will be a very important element of the Trump administration as we think about the future of our great two countries.

So now let me present to you, and please join me in welcoming, the Mayor of Medellin, Federico Gutiérrez. (Applause)

MAYOR GUTIÉRREZ: Good morning. It is a pleasure for me to be with you today at Brookings. I can tell you that a few months ago Mike and I have met in Medellin to discuss several of the issues that I will be addressing today.

I will tell you a bit about the history of the City of Medellin. It is a marvelous city with a

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difficult past, but with a great present and a brilliant future. Let me give you a bit of the context as to where we are located. We are located in the State of Antioquia; our City, Medellin, is the capital of the State of Antioquia with a population of 2.5 million inhabitants, surrounded by 10 municipalities, for a total of about 3.5 million inhabitants. What is important to tell you right now is basically what happened between the decade of the '80s and the '90s we went from being a City of fear to becoming a City of hope. And what is most important to us right now is to start building trust.

This shows you what has happened in terms of homicides in our City. In 1991 we were considered the most dangerous city in the world and there were over 381 homicides per 100,000 in habitants. No city ever in the world has ever lived this type of violence. That is why we can say we are a resilient city. It rose from this type of violence and now we have gotten to a level of only 20 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants.

I would like to ask a question to see if interpretation is necessary. (Laughter)

So after having given you this context the question is how is it that Medellin went from being such a violent city in 1991 to become a city where there is innovation, constant innovation, constant social progress, and increased investment all the time. Certainly we still have many challenges to face, but we are looking forward to the future.

So let me tell you now that one of the greatest contributions to this City has been by our friend, Bernardo Alejandro Guerra, who is part of the City Council. He was also President of the Council where I served as well for eight years. A lot of the success of Medellin has been because we have prioritized resource allocation. We must look at the social map as more important than the political map. We must invest our resources where they are actually needed and not where got the most votes.

Let me give you a brief overview of our City. We have a river that goes through the City and we basically divide the City into socioeconomic strata. The north and the south as area number one is the one where there are the highest needs, and going down to area number six, which is where most of the wealth of the City is concentrated. Here you can see the southeastern part of the City where most of the wealth is concentrated and the northern part of the City is where most of the poor people live.

This is a map that shows you the population density of our City. We see that where the areas that are more densely populated are the areas where there is less development. The darker areas

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show areas that are more populated. And the ones where there is more wealth are the places where there are fewer people and therefore we can look at this map to decide where it is that we need to focus our resources. We see that our City is surrounded by mountains. The size of the mountains, which are high risk areas, is where most of the growth has happened in a very disorganized way, starting in the '70s and '80s. This was a phenomenon that was caused by forced displacement as a result of violence in other areas of the country, and this has also led to great inequalities in the population.

The City is a city that has understood its reality and has used this reality to create its own transformation. So the result of this physical and social transformation has led to significant progress and this is where we are trying to focus most of the urban and social impacts.

So what is it that we want for our City? We want a City that is legal, safe, equitable, and sustainable. And this is the proposal that our government has made to the people, and I will show you what it is that we are going to do. The first thing I'd like to mention is that Medellin has been blessed with good and successive governments. Regardless of their political part we have been able to rescue and continue what has been done in the past in order to ensure that continuity of the good policies.

So what is that we need to do to achieve this City that we are yearning for, a legal, safe, sustainable, and equitable City? And what is absolutely necessary is to have a discussion about the issue of the culture of citizenship and a culture of legality. We need to address issues such as exclusion and poverty that are the damning legacy of drug trafficking in our City and our country. So what we are focusing on is to promote this culture of citizenship to transform our City.

So what is important for all citizens alike and for me as Mayor is to address the difficult history that our City has had. Issues such as urban security, which is -- and we have to see it as a real issue and something that is the right of every citizen. And this is what is going to allow us to give that quantum leap into the future and which is going to allow us to invest in social issues.

So let me tell you also that when we talk about security that is not an issue only pertaining to the left or the right. Security is a right of the people and is something that the government has to guarantee. There has to be usually a discussion on security and we know usually these leftist governments focus on social investment and governments that lean to the right focus only on using force. But I can tell you that it is impossible to solve the issue of safety unless we have a comprehensive policy

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and we have a strong state that can guarantee security. We have to increase social investment and it is for sure that it will be useless to try to solve everything only by using force or only by social spending. We have to articulate both and work together.

It's also important to accept reality. The worst thing that you can do is to ignore the fact that there are problems. What you must do is that you must accept the fact that there are problems and face them. And that is what we have done in our City. Certainly there are still criminal structures that persist, but what we are trying to do is get them to that breaking point. Our message to them is the culture of violence is over. We must overcome that culture of violence. This will enable us to provide new opportunities to children and youth so that we can break that circle of violence.

It is also important to focus on the fact that to understand what it is we are fighting against. We must understand that in our cities what is happening is not an ideological struggle, but rather it's not a fight between the left and the right. What is happening is these criminal organizations are trying to gain territorial control over resources. So our main task is to go after those resources and not just focus on ideology. What we must focus on mainly is to go after asset laundering and asset forfeiture as well

So what is important as well is to focus on the fact that we have not only good will but also have access to good information. We have an excellent information system and every day what we do is we have daily Security Council meetings involving the police, the military, and the prosecutor's office to review, area by area of the City, what are those criminal structures doing, what is the pattern of criminality, so that we can address them.

Another important thing that we do is that we must give the most importance to our children and our youth. For that we have a program *Buen Comienzo*, or Good Start, and it is targeted for children between 0-5 years of age. We provide care to these children from pregnancy until they are five years of age. We provide them with nutritional complements, supplements, and we are able to care for 68,000 children through this program. And this is part of our social strategy.

So when we take a look at who is part of these criminal groups and we see that we have children starting at the age of 11-12 years old to 26 years old. So what we are trying to focus on is preventing our youth and our children from entering these criminal structures. And this has to have a

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social focus. One of the issues we have been able to identify is the fact that there is a high dropout rate in schools. So what happens to these children who are not going to school? They end up roaming the streets, and then this leads to problems such as drug addiction and other social problems. And they are normally victims and caught by these criminal structures.

So my priority as Mayor is to focus and ensure that kids go to school and that they remain in protective environments where they are safe. So what we have been doing is we go out and look for the children who should be in school but are not in school. Every day every school has to turn in an absence report, every week we consolidate the report with the names of the children who did not attend school. We know where these children live, we have their addresses, and we go look for them. We knock on their doors. I have done this with my Council members. And in the past four months we have been able to rescue 1400 children and recover their life and bring them back to school. And we have been able to ensure that they go on a different path and have a better future because they have returned to these protective environments. (Applause)

So another thing that's important to understand is the value of public service. It is my idea that you cannot govern from an office, you must govern from the streets. We must go out to where people are most vulnerable and find the places to invest in. We go out to the streets, we talk to the people, we listen to them, and that is how my campaign was run. We went to the street. We were not a political party, we were a civic and citizen movement. And that is what we have been able to do. We have been governing from the streets, close to the people.

So the other thing that I can say is it's very important to work focusing area by area of the City. We have designed interventions based on the territory with these units called urban investment projects. And then what we do is we go to different communities and we realize where it is that most resources are needed and we invest those resources in the areas that need physical and social investment.

Something that is also fundamental, and this is something that happens in Latin American cities a lot, is we need to understand how to articulate the whole City and its population. We must focus on the issue of sustainable mobility. So why is mobility so important? I believe that the biggest social gaps are created, are generated by the way we move in our cities. It is evident that those

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who pay most on transportation are usually the poorest people, those who spend more time in public transportation are usually the poorest people. So we must focus on how to connect people day by day with transportation that is both secure and well connected to increase the quality of life of our citizens.

Another example of how we can improve our City is to promote and to improve our public transportation system. We analyzed who was using our transportation system and realized that 80 percent of our population are using public transportation. So that is where we were focusing most of our efforts. Before we had the Metrocable say someone who lives in the higher parts of the city, in order to get to work would need to take two buses and spend about 4000 Colombian pesos and spend about 1.5 hours of their day in public transportation just to get to work. So now with the advent of Metrocable, which is integrated to the Metro system in terms of rates and routes, this person no longer has to pay for 2 tickets, they only have to pay for 1 and it takes them half the time to get to where they need to be. This obviously results in an improved quality of life, more equitability for everyone, and the people who are benefitting the most are the people who were suffering the most in the past.

So another area that we are focusing on is social innovation. Our City is full of very steep slopes and what we have implemented in these areas is a system of electric escalators. We have focused more on the stigmatized community that are full of good people who want to work but we are trying to resolve their situation through this program.

Another system that we have is the tram. We have public bicycle rentals and bicycle lanes. And this is an example of the physical and rate integration of the whole transportation system that is benefitting 80 percent of our population who are the ones that live in the poorest conditions.

We have new projects on the horizon. This year we have started the bidding process for the Metrocable line of Picacho. It will be a very lengthy system that will cover quite a few areas. And this will benefit the communities that need to be connected because they so far have not been able to access good transportation. This is in turn going to affect the whole territory. It will trigger different effects, positive effects for the whole City.

We have other projects that are helping us consolidate our City. These are urban transformation projects. One of the ideas is to recover public spaces. So we have a project called 100 Parks for You. In this way we are trying to recover areas that can be used by families so that they won't

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be used for selling drugs or illegal activities, but rather so that they can focus on culture, sports, recreation, and family spaces.

The other project we have is focusing on the recovery of the downtown areas. If you look at any city in the world the most important part of the city is usually its downtown. In our case our downtown had been abandoned, people had lost interest in it, and what happens when people lose interest is that illegal activities start occurring in the area. So we have a campaign to recover the downtown of our City and this is a way we are focusing on integrating services and our society and security in order to eliminate criminality from this area of the City through social, urban, and physical transformation. This is a project we have undertaken this first semester of the year.

Another fundamental part of our strategy is not only education and access to higher education, but also in this we are focusing on innovation, science, and technology. Fruta M is a group that is coordinating the strategy, and by 2018 our goal is to invest two points of our GDP in innovation, science, and technology. To promote social, local, and regional development we have created an innovation district which is 170 hectares that are dedicated exclusively for companies from all over the world to come here, establish themselves, and focus on innovation. And this is a project that is already underway and we would like to invite you to participate in it.

So what we are doing is working for a city that is for its people. Something that is very noteworthy of our City is that we all have that strong feeling of belonging to the City. We are proud of our City. We, perhaps because we have lived through the worst, this has led us to feel like we have to come together as a society. This is something that no one will do for us. We have efforts involving the public and private sectors and universities in order to improve the status of our City. This is a City that's for its citizens who enjoy it and who suffer in it as well. This is a City where people laugh, where people cry. This is a City that still has many challenges. But that is why in order to overcome these problems we must ensure continuity of processes, we must dedicate time to it, we must fight against corruption, we must fight against violence, and we must work towards this common purpose.

So what is important for this transformation to take place is to build citizens' trust in us. We must focus on people who have the greatest needs and who -- on everyone who has a great responsibility towards the City.

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I would like to now thank you for the invitation, I'd like to thank Mike and Brookings for having me here, and I would like to take advantage of this opportunity to invite you to visit Medellin. It is a great City and if you go there you will never want to leave. People always fall in love with our City and this not a trite phrase, we can say that the best thing we have is our people.

Thank you. (Applause)

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you, Mayor; that was fantastic and inspirational. I'm just going to ask one question. It turns out the Mayor can stay until 11:00 and I hope most of you can too. So we'll go to the discussion in just a moment.

Okay, so the good news is the Mayor can stay until 11:00, and so we'll have some time for discussion. I'm just going to ask one question and then we'll open it up to you.

So, Mayor Gutiérrez, thank you for that inspiring and rich and beautiful presentation. I'd like to ask a question about the peace deal with the FARC and how it affects you in Medellin. So, as you underscored, there are still a lot of challenges in your City and in your country, and we know that drug production is problematic again in the area and throughout much of the region and you've mentioned many of the other ongoing challenges. I'm wondering how much the peace deal is going to help you as a Mayor, or is that an issue that's almost superfluous or, you know, secondary to what you're trying to do in Medellin? Is it more important for other parts of the country -- how does it affect you as Mayor of Medellin, the peace deal between the FARC and the central government of Colombia?

MAYOR GUTIÉRREZ: So first of all I would like to say that this is my own personal appreciation of the issue, this is -- I am not speaking on behalf of the national government. I can say that the FARC have caused huge damage to the country because they are a criminal organization. And my hope is that they actually meet the demands of the agreement, that they are responsible vis a vis their country. We are talking about a post agreement era, not necessarily a post conflict era, but because there still are several conflicts happening throughout the country. So the challenge now is to instruct that those who leave their arms behind will never pick them up again. This is something that will require reintegrating these people back into society so that they can never go back to criminality. So this can be seen as an opportunity. The government must focus on this post agreement era, especially in rural -- but they have been focusing mostly on the rural areas and not in urban areas and this could lead to problems

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in urban populations. So people who are turning in their arms are not necessarily going to be staying out in the interior of the country where they were before because they might be going to cities. And these are people who are actually recovering their own freedom. These were people who were recruited as children by the FARC and that they have seen what has happened to their friends and they are in the way also being freed from this slavery.

Something that is very important is to insure that the state guarantees, as well with the verification agencies, that the FARC actually turns over every single one of their weapons. And then this way they will not be able to persist in their criminal activities. Another important issue is to ensure that all the money that was illegally obtained from illegal activities, such as kidnappings and extortions, be declared and turned over to the state. Therefore they will not be able to use this money to exercise their political rights. It would be awful to see this money spent in a -- this money that was obtained from illegal sources to be spent on political activities. And this is something that the Attorney General has been finding, that he has been finding funds in other countries that the FARC has put away.

Something that is also of great concern and something that the government has to execute very well is to ensure that once the territories are left by the FARC the government should occupy these territories immediately so that the criminal organizations cannot take over these territories. These criminal organizations include drug traffickers and drug producers. We want to make sure that these territories are not used for planting drugs. This is a public health policy that is very important and it has to take radical control of these illegal activities so that these criminal organizations cannot return. This is a very great challenge for all our cities and this is something that we will not stop addressing.

MR. O'HANLON: Well, thank you, Mayor. It's fantastic. So let's continue the conversation now with you. I'll go first here to Mark. And then if you could please wait for a microphone and identify yourself. You can ask your question in either language but we'll wait for interpretation afterwards.

MR. SCHNEIDER: Mark Schneider, International Crisis Group. (Speaking in Spanish)

MAYOR GUTIÉRREZ: (Speaking in Spanish) (Laughter) Okay. So the FARC have affected our whole country and something that's very important is the government must insure that once the FARC are demobilized that they need to understand who it is that is going to arrive in these pre-

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concentration areas. Something that's fundamental and that the country and the international community and the U.S. must focus on is to ensure that the FARC demobilizes every single one of its members, not only those who are bearing arms but also militia men. The government has to provide guarantees for these people and to have reintegration programs. We need information to know how many people are coming into our cities so that we can be prepared for that. The three cities that are most prone and susceptible to these groups of people coming are Bogota, Medellin, and Cali, and we are working with the national reintegration committee to establish guarantees and controls by the state so that we can control these areas that are being left by the FARC, so that they will not be taken over by other criminal organizations.

MR. O'HANLON: Okay. Let's have another question. Let's go here in the second row, three persons in please.

MR. SANCHEZ: Thank you very much. Good morning. My name is Sergio Sanchez. I am the Executive Director of the Clean Air Institute based here in Washington, D.C. (Speaking in Spanish)

MAYOR GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you very much for your question. Something that's very important for our City is to be sustainable. And among the sustainability goals we want to be environmentally sustainable. The air we breathe in most cities is usually polluted by public transportation, that is why I have been focusing so much on public transportation. If we take a look at the sources of pollution, air pollution, 80 percent comes from moving sources such as buses, cars, and so on, and 20 percent comes from static sources, such as industry. So that is why we need to focus, among other things, on the kinds of fuel that we use.

Another issue for our City is that our geographic location, we are a valley surrounded by mountains. And what happens depends on the weather conditions, so the air gets trapped inside this valley and it acts like a pressure cooker and where the polluted air is not able to escape the valley. So what we are focusing on is enhancing our metro system, our Metrocable, the tram, and to use non motorized units. We are installing more walkways to be used by pedestrians, we have more bike trails. For example, Bogota has 40 kilometers in bike paths. In four years my goal is by the end of my tenure to have 80 kilometers of bike trails. And also we also would like to renew our fleet by the end of my term as

well so that we can migrate to full use of clean fuel. And these are actions however that not only the government has to undertake, these actions must be undertaken by the population itself. We must promote a culture of citizenship and environmental culture to clean our environment together with our citizen.

MR. O'HANLON: Great. We probably only have time for one more question. So the woman in red, about eight rows back, please.

QUESTIONER: (Speaking in Spanish).

MAYOR GUTIÉRREZ: I think that this is a question that can be best answered by Ambassador Pinzón We have a wonderful Ambassador here. We are very proud of him. He has been doing a great job.

What I have noticed is there currently is a very high degree of uncertainty in Colombia and Latin America in general. The message I would have is that we can say that there has not been a greater ally or more cooperative ally in the region than Colombia. We have been working as a team with the U.S. We are hardworking people, we are the best of the region, and at the same time we feel solidarity with countries of the region, such as Mexico. We I believe will need to have a head on fight against narco trafficking and that this is what I believe will be what the U.S. will demand of us, not only of Colombia but also of other countries of the region. We must fight against drug trafficking and we must ensure the eradication of illegal cultivation of drugs. We must also focus on social support, and this is very important for us in our City. I have been meeting here with the Department of State, with the Department of Justice, and we would like to ensure that we share information so that we can work towards the eradication of violence. There are people that are engaging in drug trafficking, in violence. And this is something that will not be tolerated either by us in Medellin or by the U.S. either.

MR. O'HANLON: Everyone, please join me in thanking Mayor Gutiérrez. (Applause)

MAYOR GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you very much.

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