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## Colombian President On Anti-terrorist Commitments

*by John Neagle*

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At a speech during a military ceremony in Bogota on Dec. 7, Colombian President Virgilio Barco promised to combat all forms of terrorism and violence, and that Colombian democracy could not afford to accommodate itself in anyway with terrorists, regardless of their origins or political ambitions. In part, Barco was referring to a proposal by certain guerrilla groups to enter into new negotiations to establish a peace pact with the government. The president asserted that the "indispensable prerequisite" to such negotiations is for the guerrillas to "cease their terrorist actions...No one can ignore in discussions for peace that the guerrillas have acquired a terrorist character." Next, Barco emphasized that ultrarightist groups who allegedly dedicate themselves to combatting guerrillas are also unacceptable. "Armed organizations have emerged that without any justification and in total contradiction with the law, take upon themselves the task of a false crusade against the subversives. The most obscure interests are hidden behind this...proposal. Their reprehensible actions deserve the same condemnation as those perpetrated by the guerrillas." The president stated that rightist paramilitary groups will be prosecuted under the new state of emergency legislation which mandates life prison terms for persons guilty of terrorism. In 1988, at least 484 persons have died in multiple murders attributed to the so-called paramilitary groups. "Persons responsible for massacres will pay a high price for their sadistic behavior. They will find themselves forgotten in prison, and with no possibility of pardon," said Barco. The Colombian leader expressed strong support for the armed forces, saying that those who believe that soldiers do not have the right to life are mistaken. He asserted that Colombian soldiers are committed to an extremely onerous task, faced with enemies who do not vacillate in their commitment to death and destruction. These remarks were in reference to frequent guerrilla ambushes perpetrated against the military. In 1988, an estimated 821 soldiers and police have died in such ambushes. (Basic data from AP, Radio Caracol, 12/07/88)

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