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Colombia: US\$6 Billion Three-year Anti-poverty Program

by Barbara Khol

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On Oct. 16 in Santa Marta, President Cesar Gaviria announced a three-year US\$6 billion anti-poverty program. At present, 13 million of 30 million Colombians live in poverty. The president said the initiative is to be financed by foreign loans (51%, or US\$3.1 billion), and federal government tax revenues (about US\$2.9 billion). The program includes road construction and repairs, "recovery" of the nation's abandoned railway system, and investments in social infrastructure (health, education, potable water, sewer systems, and housing). Potable water and sewage systems are currently available to 30% and 54%, respectively, of the population. Within the next three years, another 2 million Colombians will gain access to potable water and sewage treatment services. Enrollment in primary, secondary and university education is expected to increase by 1 million. Another component of the program is aimed at increasing food production, and incorporation of 500,000 ha. of new land into cultivation. Gaviria predicted a "peaceful revolution" characterized by GDP growth of 4% in 1992, 4.5% in 1993, and 5% in 1994, with consumer price inflation at 20% per annum. Assuming a successful "revolution" by 1995, he said, the poor will number 9 million. In addition, illiteracy in urban areas would have disappeared, and 95% of school age children in rural Colombia will be attending classes. (Basic data from EFE, 10/16/91)

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