

## Bogota - the World's Peace Capital:

### Where Do We Go From Here?

by

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Bogota hosted a world peace summit on October 1-4, 2009, with participating speakers from Colombia and many other countries. The mayor's office of Bogota and pacifist organizations organized the summit, declaring that Bogota is the world's peace capital. Since Colombia has violence with crime, guerrilla and paramilitary groups, the internal situation was the elephant in the room, unsurprisingly absorbing almost all the attention. There are some two and a half million refugees (desplazados), driven from rural areas by paramilitary forces, FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarios de Colombia, Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) or drug gangs.

Colombia has been dealing with guerrilla groups for some 40 years. The most powerful group, FARC, started with political goals but from everything I can see has become a criminal group dealing in kidnapping and drug trafficking. Against all logic and public relations, FARC has kept some people for 11 years and counting. Efforts lead by President Alvaro Uribe have greatly reduced their numbers and influence.

In 1986, the Colombian government instituted self defense groups that have become Frankenstein's monster. The paramilitary groups have participated in their own crimes.

Human rights groups have condemned the Colombian government's record. The most heinous crimes are carried out by the armed forces in "false positives." The military kills young men in rural areas and puts their bodies in guerrilla clothing. No one in President Uribe's government tells him about these atrocities. He apparently learns about these murders in the newspapers. He reacts to criticism by human rights or church groups by declaring that FARC has infiltrated these groups.

FARC has good reason to be leery of government offers. As part of a peace process started in 1984 with President Belisario Betancur, FARC initiated a ceasefire and started a political party, la Union Patriotica (Patriotic Union) to pursue its goals. Bu 1995, paramilitary groups, elements from the Colombian security forces and drug lords killed 3, 500 party members, among them two presidential candidates, 8 congressmen, 70 city council members and 11 mayors. There were some prosecutions of the triggermen but none for those who paid for the assassinations.

I encourage peaceniks to 1) reach out to environmentalists, 2) look for assistance from the rich countries to abolish poverty, and, 3) seek to end the war on drugs. The environmentalists are a natural recruiting pool for the peaceniks and vice versa. Even

when there is no war, armed forces consume resources and in their operations add to the world's carbon dioxide level. The US armed forces are in fact exempt from some environmental laws. When war breaks out, there is terrible environmental damage in addition to human and property losses.

As long as there is poverty, there is war. There are some groups, mainly in Europe, seeking to end poverty. Look at the efforts pursued by the Global Marshall Plan ([www.globalmarshallplan.org](http://www.globalmarshallplan.org)). After the Second World War, many Americans were concerned about the slow recovery in Europe, the poverty and unrest that could easily bring extremists or Communists to power. Secretary of State George Marshall asked the US Congress to start an aid program. The official name, European Recovery Program, eventually disbursed \$12.8 billion to Western European countries, enabling them to start a road to quick recovery. The popular name was the Marshall Plan. Many people like me are seeking a second Marshall Plan to abolish poverty everywhere. At the Bogota conference, several speakers said that a 10% reduction in the world's defense budget would pay for every necessary anti-poverty program.

Foreign aid programs have had a mixed record, at best. There will have to be transparency and accountability in the Second Marshall Plan that is largely absent from existing programs. American rabbi Michael Lerner proposes in such a program that each receiving country would have a board of directors including clergy, teachers, union leaders and peasants, not just the usual politicians and bankers.

As an example of intertwining goals with the peaceniks and environmentalists, Lester Brown, award winning environmental analyst and president of the Earth Policy Institute proposes investing \$190 billion per year in a type of second Marshall Plan for the world's poor and environmental restoration. The social goals component of \$77 billion per year include universal primary education, eradication of adult illiteracy, school lunch programs, assistance for preschool children and pregnant women, universal health care and condom distribution. The earth restoration goals of \$113 billion include planting trees, protecting topsoil, restoring rangelands, restoring fisheries, protecting biodiversity and stabilizing water tables. An additional idea is to pay the poor children in rich and poor countries to go to school.

In an effort at population stabilization, I recommend a social security program in every poor country. People have children for many reasons. One important reason is to have someone around when they get old. With a social security program, there would be less incentive to have more than two children.

It is time to end the failed war on drugs. There will be no peace in Colombia, Mexico or any other country as long as the drug war continues. Due to the astronomical profits, drug dealers can buy cooperation from law enforcement officials and politicians as it happened during the Prohibition in the US. As evidence for the failure, for many years, drug prices have declined while drug quality has increased. Legalization and regulation for marijuana, opium and cocaine is the best solution. Treat currently illegal drugs as a public health responsibility rather than as a police matter. Since the illegal drug trade

provides FARC and the paramilitary groups 70% of their income, legalization would reduce illegal operations and diminish violence everywhere in Colombia and everywhere else.

Starting wars are fairly easy. Hermann Goering told his interrogators at Nuremberg that starting a war in a democracy or dictatorship is easy. The government only has to announce that the country is under attack and the people rally. President George W. Bush proved the point in alleging that Iraq was a threat to the United States. On the other hand, as British Prime Minister Lloyd George remarked at the Versailles Conference following the First World War that making peace was harder than making war.

Humankind's threat comes from climate change which is far more subtle threat than from the Axis Powers during the Second World War. Atom bombs, aircraft carriers, tanks, helicopters, machine guns and the rest will do us no good. What the terrorists do or do not do will not make any difference.

After the Soviet Union's fall, I am puzzled why the US defense budget is higher than ever. Outspoken Rear Admiral Eugene Carroll, Jr. observed, "For forty-five years of the Cold War we were in an arms race with the Soviet Union. Now it appears that we are in an arms race with ourselves." Our defense establishment is set up to fight another major power and is not equipped to deal with terrorists.

Current industrial production and living patterns are condemning us to increasing heat, rising ocean levels, violent storms and droughts that will bring environmental refugees and unrest beyond control. I was born in 1944 and will not see the truly miserable times projected. People born after 1990 are in for a hard time unless there are dramatic changes. Incremental change will not be enough. I am still an optimist. I remember a priest saying in 1963, "The difficult we do today. The impossible we do tomorrow."

Ed O'Rourke, a long time Houston, Texas resident and certified public accountant, now lives in Medellin, Colombia. He and his wife visited Flatonía and frequently bought antiques.

For those who can read Spanish, see more about the World Peace Summit at: [www.cumbremundialdepaz2009.org](http://www.cumbremundialdepaz2009.org).

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