

I now give the floor to the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

**Mr. Valero Briceño** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me to congratulate you, Mr. President, on behalf of my delegation, on having organized this debate on a subject of such pertinence.

The Government of Colombia, according to official statements broadly published in the press, has brought to the Security Council accusations against the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela under President Hugo Chávez Frías. This was confirmed to the EFE news agency by the President of the Council, Ambassador Thomas Mayr-Harting, Permanent Representative of Austria to the United Nations.

Since today we are discussing the protection of civilians in armed conflict, the Bolivarian Government would like to take this opportunity not only to refer to the subject at hand, but also to the installation of seven foreign military bases in Colombia and its implications for the protection of civilians and peace and security in our region.

Venezuela, fortunately, has no armed conflict requiring the protection of civilians. Our country, however, has a progressive policy of protection for civilians from other countries: displaced persons and refugees alike. Venezuela has received the greatest number of displaced persons and refugees as a direct result of the uninterrupted internal armed conflict that has plagued Colombia for more than 60 years. A significant number of the 4 million Colombian men, women and children in Venezuela have fled violence in their country. According to the “2008 Global Trends” report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Colombia has more than 3 million internally displaced persons and “continues to have one of the largest IDP populations in the world”.

The Government of Venezuela therefore signed, on 18 January 2008, an agreement with UNHCR to provide microcredit to Colombian refugees who are in our country, benefiting more than 200,000 people. Colombians coming to Venezuela are offered all of these Government social programmes free of charge.

The establishment of United States military bases in Colombia threatens peace in the region and extends the Colombian diaspora into many countries, in particular neighbouring countries. The establishment of these military bases cannot be separated from the impact that they will have in terms of increasing the number of refugees and displaced persons.

The countries of our region, despite our differences, live in peace, a peace that has only been interrupted in recent years, when Colombian military forces invaded Ecuador. That invasion was categorically condemned by the twentieth Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Rio Group, held in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, on 6 and 7 March 2008. The President of Colombia, Álvaro Uribe, in an alleged act of repentance, pledged that his Government would never again engage in belligerent action against any country on the continent. The leaders of the Rio Group therefore stated:

“We note, with satisfaction, the full apology that President Álvaro Uribe offered to the Government and people of Ecuador, for the violation on March 1, 2008, of the territory and sovereignty of this sister nation by Colombian security forces.”

I would like to inform you, Sir, and all the other members of the Council that the establishment of the United States military bases in Colombia is disrupting the peaceful coexistence of nations by creating a dangerous geo-strategic reality that may provoke conflict on a massive, continent-wide scale. These military bases will turn Colombia, as stated by Commander Fidel Castro, into an overseas territory. An official document of the United States Air Force from May 2009 states that the Palenquero base, one of the seven military bases that will be installed in Colombia, will help with the task of mobility by ensuring access to the entire continent of South America, with the exception of Cape Horn, if fuel is available, and over half of the continent without having to refuel.

Venezuela would like to state here the danger that this expansionist plan of the United States Government represents, which aims to transform Colombia into an enclave for political, economic, cultural and military domination over the entire continent. The United States military presence in Colombia claims to be justified by the fight against drug trafficking and terrorism.

However, the former President of Colombia, Mr. Ernesto Samper Pizarro, claims that “these bases are not to combat terrorism and drug trafficking in Colombia”. With regard to the C-17, P-3 Orion and AWAT aircraft that the United States Government will transport to its military bases in Colombia, President Samper said,

“My God! This is a carrier for electronic surveillance for the hemisphere. That is what not only Venezuela but also Brazil and the countries of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) fear, with reason.”

The South American Governments have expressed concern about the establishment of United States bases in Colombia. At the UNASUR summit held in Bariloche, Argentina, on 28 August 2009, heads of State stated that,

“The presence of foreign military forces cannot, with the means and resources dedicated to their stated objectives, threaten the sovereignty and integrity of any South American nation and therefore peace and security in the region.”

This is also cause for concern in the United States, as evidenced by the letter dated 28 July 2009 that Senators Patrick Leahy and Christopher Dodd sent to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

Venezuela and Colombia were born at the same moment in the history of the Americas, after the battles of Boyacá and Carabobo, under the leadership of our liberator, Simón Bolívar. The Bolivarian Government yearns for peace in Colombia and throughout the region. That is why President Hugo Chávez Frías has always offered his assistance to achieve peace in this neighbouring country.

Plan Colombia has failed. Drug trafficking has increased its influence in Colombia and has cornered major levels of the Colombian State and its institutions. If our Central American brothers, who lived through bloody armed conflicts, were able to achieve peace, how is it that the people of Colombia continue to suffer under this painful military confrontation?

The answer is very simple. Central Americans opted for dialogue and political negotiations as a means of reaching peace. The Colombian Government, however, persists in waging war. That Government would rather give up its sovereignty than accept that there is an internal armed conflict in their country that is causing horrific displacements of human beings. The armed conflict in Colombia has left over 100,000 dead.

Allow me to conclude by stating that the Bolivarian Government is a Government of peace. Only once in our history has our army gone beyond the borders of our country, and it was to contribute to the struggle for independence and freedom of our neighbouring countries.