

## Colombia Asks for Help in Combating Terrorism

"We need the democracies of the world to help Colombia defeat terrorism," declared Colombian President Alvaro Uribe Vélez. "Just as the United Nations is taking a decision on the case of Iraq, we need the world to decide to help Colombia." The president spoke on February 7, after a brutal attack that left more than 33 dead and 157 wounded at the Club El Nogal in what was formerly one of the safest areas of Bogotá.

Colombia has experienced many acts of violence perpetrated by various guerrilla groups, paramilitary organizations and organized crime. However, the collective massacre of civilians (including six children) in an elite social institution that counted among its members politicians, prominent industrialists and businessmen, was a chilling indication of a new strategy of urban terrorism. Most analysts interpreted the attack on the club, located in an exclusive residential zone of the capital that is home to apartment buildings, embassies, gyms, schools and shopping centers frequented by wealthy Colombians, as an attempt by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) to pressure for concessions on its terms. As a recent editorial in *El Tiempo*, one of Colombia's main newspapers, opined, "the El Nogal bombing cannot be understood simply as a demented act; instead, it is part of a strategy. It is a tool to pressure the government to restart negotiations toward what interests the FARC the most: freeing its members from government jails and achieving symbolic recognition of its belligerence."

For its part, the Colombian government argues that transnational terrorist networks are supplying the FARC with sophisticated assistance in carrying out attacks. In declarations to the press, Defense Minister Marta Lucía Ramírez pointed out that the bombing was not the act of rustic guerrillas who "came down from the mountains." She argued that groups such as the FARC and ELN guerrillas receive support from other outlaw organizations, "such as possibly the IRA and ETA." Terrorism, fed by drug trafficking, is "a real and serious threat," she added-not just for Colombia, but for "the entire region."

After holding the FARC responsible for the attack, the Colombian government asked the international community to declare the group a terrorist organization. Colombia's main goals in its international campaign are: to propose that the permanent council of the Organization of American States (OAS) take a tougher stance toward terrorism, and to apply UN Security Council Resolution 1373, which provides for freezing the assets of terrorist groups and pursuing their members.

President Uribe also wrote to other South American leaders-Hugo Chávez of Venezuela, Luiz Inácio da Silva of Brazil, Alejandro Toledo of Peru, and Lucio Gutiérrez of Ecuador-asking them to "formally designate the FARC as a terrorist organization and support us in persuading other regional and international forums to do the same." He further asked that, "in accordance with the provisions of the

Lima Agreement which our countries signed in June 2002, Resolution 1373 of the United Nations Security Council, and the Inter-American Anti-Terrorism Convention, we join forces to defeat the threat that is causing so much damage to my country."

Some observers believe that with this latest act of terror the FARC has destroyed any chance for peace and, from the international perspective, transformed the Colombian conflict into another chapter in the war against terror. *Semana* magazine suggested that by perpetrating an assault that most resembles the type of religious fanaticism seen in the Middle East, the FARC has earned itself "a collective reaction that at least for now favors a military response" to the violence.

See [http://eltiempo.terra.com.co/hist\\_imp/2003-02-09/index.html](http://eltiempo.terra.com.co/hist_imp/2003-02-09/index.html)