

**SPEAKING NOTES
THE HONOURABLE NOËL A. KINSELLA
SPEAKER OF THE SENATE**

**ON THE OCCASION OF A DINNER HOSTED
BY THE AMBASSADOR OF COLOMBIA TO CANADA**

**CARTAGENA, COLOMBIA
19 JANUARY 2012**

Your Excellency Ambassador Forero-Ucros,
Honourable parliamentarians,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

On behalf of all members of the Canadian delegation, I would like to thank Ambassador Forero-Ucros for her gracious hospitality. This is our fourth day in Colombia and we have been continually impressed and touched by the warmth and generosity of the Colombian people.

Ambassador Forero-Ucros, I am particularly pleased to meet you once again. Throughout your successful career, you have held distinguished positions in various fields. Recently, you served as a delegate of the Colombian President to the Presidential Council of the Andean Community as well as deputy minister of foreign affairs, a position you have occupied twice during your career. You have also served as a Permanent Representative of Colombia to the United Nations, as Ambassador to Sweden and as a non-resident Ambassador to Norway, Denmark, Finland and Iceland. Your long experience in the world of politics and diplomacy has given you an invaluable knowledge of the dynamics that govern relations between countries. As such, it is a pleasure to be here and to have the opportunity to discuss the different aspects that shape Canada–Colombia relations.

Our countries enjoy a strong relationship based on our cooperation in many areas, including security, human rights, trade and development assistance. Canada and Colombia share a longstanding commitment to hemispheric peace and stability. Since 2006, Canada has invested over \$25 million in Colombia through the Global Peace and Security Fund in support of regional and local efforts to prevent and reduce violence and to facilitate dialogue on conflict-related issues. These security-focused activities are further aided by Colombia's participation in Canada's Counter-Terrorism and Anti-Crime Capacity Building Programs, as well as our regular security consultations which are held every two years.

Human rights is another important area in which our two countries cooperate. This is subject matter with which I have some familiarity. As a professor at St. Thomas University in Fredericton, New Brunswick, for nearly 42 years, I had the pleasure of teaching human rights to young students. I was also fortunate to be able to serve as Chairperson of the New Brunswick Human Rights Commission for 22 years.

The opportunity to attend the Conference on Human Rights at the Diplomatic Academy three days ago was thus most welcome, where the progress Colombia has made in promoting and protecting human rights was discussed. Canada and Colombia hold annual human rights consultations with the most recent having taken place in Ottawa in July 2011. These meetings underscore our willingness to work together in areas of mutual interest, and pave the way for new dimensions of cooperation. The selection of Colombia as a country of focus in Canada's new aid effectiveness agenda is evidence of this fact, and in 2009–2010 the Canadian International Development Agency's assistance to Colombia totalled close to \$19 million.

Canada and Colombia's economic relationship continues to thrive. It is an exciting time for our bilateral trade. The coming into force of the Canada–Colombia Free Trade Agreement in August 2011 is reflective of our joint aims to stimulate economic growth and promote prosperity amongst our peoples. The Agreement will benefit Canadians and Colombians across a diverse range of sectors, from the Colombian exporters who provide Canada with half of its fresh cut flowers, to the importers of Canadian off-highway dump trucks. By forging closer economic ties, the Free Trade Agreement will better enable our two countries to help each other to achieve common goals.

Tonight, we have an opportunity to further our understanding of the common goals that Colombia and Canada can achieve together. Holding informal discussion with knowledgeable people in such pleasant surroundings helps us build on the meetings we have had and familiarize ourselves with the current situation in Colombia. Be assured that we will put this learning to good use once we return to Ottawa.

In closing, on behalf of all members of our delegation, I would like to thank Ambassador Forero-Ucros once again for hosting this wonderful dinner. Please join me in raising a toast to the strength of the Canada–Colombia relationship.

¡Salud!