

# Colombians see nation imperiled, call for coup to fight drug mob

by Valerie Rush

On Jan. 13, *EIR* offices in Bogotá, Colombia received a facsimile of a letter sent to President Virgilio Barco by former ambassador to France Enrique Gómez Hurtado. The letter calls on the Colombian head of state "to provoke a crisis of state," to head up a civilian coup d'état against his own collapsed government, to dissolve Congress, the courts, and all other non-functional institutions in the country, and to impose a one-year provisional dictatorship under wartime conditions, to permit the rescue of Colombia from the stranglehold of narco-terrorism and the drug mafia.

The Dec. 30 release of international drug kingpin Jorge Ochoa from a top-security Colombian prison is described in Gómez's letter as but the latest episode in more than a decade of "degradation" of the nation's institutions, which has caused the Colombian state to finally "cease to exist." The letter also asserts: "Investiture provides you the opportunity to make history in your name, or against it. . . . Yes, Mr. President, the bell must be rung, and you have been chosen to ring it. If you will not do it, for reasons I cannot grasp, let others do it. What the nation does not need is a President of degradation."

In addition to being a respected diplomat, Gómez is also the director of a prestigious economics weekly and spokesman for a political faction within the opposition Social Conservative Party. His letter, which has circulated widely throughout Colombia, is an unequivocal warning by fed-up political and military layers that either Barco's ignominious "narco-tolerance" comes to an end, or his presidency will.

## A private war against narcos

A number of incidents in early January suggest that Colombians—despairing of justice in their country—are now launching their own private war against the drug mob. Criminal judge Andres Montañez, the man who signed the release papers for Ochoa, was the victim of an assassination attempt by unknown assailants Jan. 10. He survived the attempt. One day earlier, in the mafia-dominated city of Medellín, heavily armed individuals penetrated a luxurious mansion in the exclusive El Poblado neighborhood, considered the center of operations of the cocaine-trafficking cartel. Eight individuals were seized; their bullet-riddled bodies turned up later that day on street corners throughout El Poblado.

The most stunning action against the cocaine mob, however, was the Jan. 13 dynamite-bombing of a Medellín building, discovered to be the property of Cartel head Pablo Es-

cobar Gaviria. The bomb, whose explosion was heard throughout the city, blew open a 7-foot-deep crater. Needless to say, this drew official attention to the bunker-like, multi-story building, which turned out to contain a fortune in priceless antique and modern cars, paintings, and sculptures owned by Escobar's wife. The building also contained more than a score high-power motorcycles and a substantial weapons cache. In short, the building was the mafia's logistics center for contract assassinations.

The building itself had never been registered with city authorities, and its owner had paid no taxes on it. It was constructed by the firm of Londoño White; one of the Londoño White brothers was the treasurer of the Liberal Party's presidential campaign in 1982, and had served as liaison between the party and the cocaine mafia. Londoño White personally had arranged a May 1984 meeting in Panama between then Liberal presidential candidate Alfonso López Michelsen and Escobar, Ochoa, and other chieftains of the Medellín Cartel. At that meeting, the Cartel bosses had offered to pay off Colombia's foreign debt and bring their ill-gotten billions back into Colombia, in exchange for drug legalization.

López Michelsen was more than eager to comply, but failed to win back the presidency. However, now the international bankers have taken up that mafia offer. While the rest of the Ibero-American continent is in declared or de facto moratorium on its debt payments, Colombia not only punctually services its \$16 billion foreign debt, but has just been granted approval of a \$1.06 billion "jumbo" loan by its international creditors. As one knowledgeable Colombian banker put it, "This is an unprecedented case of an international banking deal which presupposes the well-being of the mafia for its compliance."

## Narcos cry 'foul play'

The Gómez letter to President Barco, which shatters all precedent by identifying former President López as a politician financed by the mob, has provoked a chorus of outraged responses from the very narco-politicians he would root out. Liberal Party president Alberto Santofimio Botero, with documented links to the drug mafia, denounced Gómez as a "fascist" who would "subvert the legal order," while Liberal Sen. and López protegé Ernesto Samper Pizano—Colombia's leading advocate of drug legalization—charged Gómez

with having dreams of reviving the bloody 1950s dictatorship of his father.

Other commentaries, from across the political spectrum, were exemplified by that of Conservative senator Jaime Arias Ramírez, who rejected Gómez's solution, and argued instead, "What we have to discover is how to survive for the next two years, and then in 1990, elect a great candidate to make a great government."

The anti-drug newspaper *El Espectador*, which has dedicated its daily editorials to pleading for genuine statesmanship from the President, commented Jan. 14 on the Gómez letter: "Another symptom of national anxiety is the letter of Mr. Enrique Gómez Hurtado to President Barco, asking him to produce a 'crisis of state,' or allow others to do it, given the collapse of authority symbolized by the case of drug trafficker Ochoa. In reality, the state is already in crisis and the solution can be none other than leadership, exercised by

whoever should and can do it . . . with the hope that the current ruler is not inferior to his mission."

A second Jan. 14 editorial, by the same daily, wryly drew its own conclusion: "The President is not here. He appears to already be on the campaign trail, making promises from some distant site where the voices of alarm, multiplying in every corner of the nation, cannot reach him."

President Barco's own response to the Gómez letter came in the form of a nationwide television address Jan. 13, where he declared that "to enter into illegality leaves the actions of state without legitimacy, and gives justification to the barbarities of those who seek to impose their own law. . . . To deny the state of law in order to defend democracy is not a happy formula."

President Barco's repeated defense of what Gómez calls in his letter "a justice of shysters and cheats" and a "kingdom of highwaymen," may very well go on his political epitaph.

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## Documentation

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# 'The Colombian state has ceased to exist'

*The following is a letter sent by former Colombian ambassador to France Enrique Gómez Hurtado, to Virgilio Barco Vargas. A copy of the letter was sent to the offices of EIR in Bogota, and we reprint it in full translation.*

Mr. President:

I have thought long and hard about what I am about to write. The circumstances of my life have enabled me to observe and follow political developments closely, while supporting my household by means of the occupation of an enlightened bourgeois. These conditions give me certain rights, and impose certain obligations upon me. My country's tribulations force me to exercise the former, and to discharge the latter. Having nothing but the written word at my disposal, I make use of it to address one who bears the republic's highest dignity.

What I say here is entirely my own responsibility. Seek no partner or companion behind this letter. Enrique Gómez Hurtado, a seventy-year-old Colombian citizen, says this.

Victor Hugo once wrote: "When duty is clearly seen, to have doubts about the course of action is to have already fallen." And another of France's great liberals, Rousseau, told us that "the weakness of the body promotes the weakness of the soul, and the weakness of the soul always increases the

weakness of the body." We clearly see we have a high duty to perform, and we are not performing it; thus we are falling ever faster, becoming injured, as any organism will, to new circumstances which would be intolerable had we not previously been in a comparable situation.

From the inside, from within the enclosure of our decadence, our living environment is tolerated, has acquired a certain normality, as if decadence were our natural condition. But as it appears from the outside, comparatively, what is happening to us Colombians offers a spectacle of degradation scarcely comprehensible to those who view us from abroad. That a country such as ours, with its Western cultural heritage, with the institutions our forefathers bequeathed us, with the intrinsic human warmth of its inhabitants, should be consuming itself in the pit of ignominy, does not appear to have any possible justification. And so we are rightly deemed guilty for doing evil to ourselves, and to others. Our degradation has made the condition of being Colombian degrading in itself, as a logical consequence.

It is thus completely inappropriate for the government to declare that it considers "offensive" a State Department pronouncement which says what has to be said about Colombia. For Colombia to now present arguments based on a state of law, is an irritating, cynical, cowardly joke. In our country, that which was the law is only servicing those who have found in it the conscience they lack. We have arrived at absolute moral poverty, which is infinitely sadder than the absolute poverty you say you are fighting.

I am more than old enough not to want my life to be consumed by degradation. As a responsible parent, I fathered children, and it is not my intention that they should find reason to indict me. Degradation defines the limit of my

patience. I do not want prevailing weakness of character to promote the weakness of my soul, nor that my weakened soul promote the weakness of the social body in which I will live out the remaining time that God has given me, and in which my children will live out the promise of their existence.

I do not wish to be ashamed of myself, nor of my ancestors, nor of my country. I aspire to end my days deserving of my condition as a free citizen, and not as a co-participant in degradation. Vásquez de Mella told us that peoples wed death the same day they divorce themselves from history. We have divorced ourselves from ours, and have contracted marriage with death, which accompanies us night and day, solicitous and familiar. Death is nothing to fear unto itself, but for the dignity and the reason it comes. In this quarrel in the midst of fog, we die each day—those who go to the cemetery and those of us who await our turn, with neither dignity nor a reason within our grasp. We must find them both, whether to die or to continue living.

Mr. President, you freely chose to be President; you were made responsible, with undeniable support, for historic developments. You are therefore debtor to your guilt, and creditor to your merit. What you cannot aspire to be is a witness. Investiture provides you the opportunity to make history in your name, or against it. Many have been the pleas that an anguished people have made to those presumed responsible for rallying a joint effort that can put our nation in its proper place. Those responsible have turned a deaf ear to the din of chaos.

However, the task shouldn't be difficult, although it is undoubtedly heroic. It shouldn't be difficult if a consensus on essentials is reached, but it will be risky if we have permitted life to lose its worth. Although the opportunity is there, in plain view, no one wants to take advantage of it, for doing so requires certain human qualities which would seem to have fled the soul of Colombians: prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. As a result, our State is imprudent, unjust, weak and out-of-joint. But, if what we suffer is a lack of the cardinal virtues, so indispensable to be honorable men, I feel that these virtues, though battered and frightened, still exist within the souls of Colombians. I have no doubt that if called upon, they shall come forth. Whosoever rings the bell, has his hands on history. Sometimes everything collapses because the bell-ringer does not appear, while the mobs fill the streets.

Yes, Mr. President, the bell must be rung, and you have been chosen to ring it. Make it ring! If you do not want to do it, for reasons I cannot grasp, let others do it. What the nation does not need is a ruler who is the president of degradation.

There have been many episodes which have bent us low. There is no point in listing them here. It is enough to know of them to live with a hunched soul. But I think that the basic problem which is destroying our society is the problem of justice. Recent developments, scandalous in the extreme, are only the result of a process known by all, which has forced

us to survive without justice. Saint Augustine asked himself: Without justice, what are kingdoms but bands of highwaymen? We must admit, we have allowed our Colombia to become this, delivered over to bad justice. As Quevedo would say today, criminals do less evil than a bad judge.

Mr. President: All we Colombians knew that Mr. Ochoa would be released, that the Colombian State would be inferior to him, that there was no power to oppose a true criminal of means and purpose, on the part of a state with neither one nor the other. The only doubt which remained was how the outrage would be committed. And it was committed in the name of justice! Of a "justice" with no vocation to be so, a justice of shysters and cheats which complains it lacks the material means to do more of what it is not doing, but which is really lacking in spirit. What remains of our army, our police, of our capacity to work and invest, of our desire to be men, in this kingdom of highwaymen?

Other matters, all of them minor, keep us from standing tall: the incongruence of the State, absurd labor legislation, lack of national and foreign investment, the decadence of Congress, corruption in both the public and private sector. . . . They have been named so often that the list has become innocuous. The reciting of our ills has acquired the pathetic quality of filler material for writers without a theme. But it has a quality acquired through repetition: It has formed a consensus about changes so often proposed and so late in coming, not to be expected from sensationalist demagoguery wrapped in obsolete dogmas; elementary logic, to the liberalism that you claim to champion and to the living traditionalism which I profess, which are not mutually exclusive but convergent, as Laureano Gómez and Alberto Lleras Camargo were able to understand, when they re-founded a democracy full of hope, which we have allowed to become this regime of which we can only be ashamed.

I do not know what fate awaits what I write here, whether it will be read and heeded. You are, Mr. President, a near total enigma, both for those who elected you and those of us who did not. It is possible that you may be like the crab Unamuno said could very well be able, within its shell, to do infinitesimal calculus. But from the outside. . . .

I address myself to you because the Republic has designated you bell-ringer, and not because you, any more than anyone else, are the cause of this intolerable degradation. We have all shared in causing it. The parties, the politicians, the judges, the businessmen, and so many others, and of course, the criminals, be they wrapped in political banners or covered with ill-gotten money. But there is a difference between these latter and the rest. The latter do things which the rest of us let them do to us.

And this goes way back, to when the mafiosi started financing politics; to when President López abandoned a good constitutional reform and then, like Boabdil, cried as a citizen over what he did not know how to defend as President;

to when absurd tax reforms prohibited savings and investment, and created a grey area for hot money, in which hard-earned money and profits from crime intermingled to the clear benefit of the criminals; to when the Supreme Court began its chain of infamous rulings, first to protect its privileges and then to deliver justice into the hands of the mafia, with arguments which would be laughable if they weren't the cause of its own downfall; to when we all tolerated what has rightly been called the "dictatorship of Peace," that senseless adventure on which we are still embarked, and which was originally promoted and led by President Betancur, and which now has no leadership.

One of your advisers, Mr. President, has just said that "the peace accords are in crisis." Could there be any greater flight from reality? How will Colombia manage, Mr. President, to explain to the world the comings and goings of the government in the monstrous Ochoa case? How will it explain that what was possible became impossible, and then possible again once the drug traffickers were freed? Will this grotesque mockery have no consequences for the nation? Can this legitimately be called government?

There are many things which must be corrected, but as I said before, the task is not as difficult as it seems. I feel that it is enough to begin it, and events will merge into the current of regeneration. What cannot be doubted is that the degradation of the Republic must be stopped, or the Republic will disappear. Very little of it is left to us already. We have lost the dignity necessary to have a right to sovereignty. We cannot expect our voice to be heard with respect in the concert of nations. Besides, the sovereignty we lose is not even ours *de jure*. Large extensions of our national territory are controlled by those who obey orders from abroad, and the country is subject to the dictates of crime. If the Ochoa ignominy boils down to the firing of underlings—doubtless enriched by their infamy—it is because our state has ceased to be sovereign. This lack of *raison d'être* cannot be excused by the indignation of a President, a minister, and an official, all of whom complain that they weren't obeyed and utter their surprise at something we all knew. If they didn't know it, if they don't rule, if they are not obeyed, their presence is unjustified. In any state not so degraded, the Ochoa case would have caused a deep crisis of State.

Mr. President, the Colombian State has ceased to exist. Your dignity should not allow you to preside over carrion. The State must be created anew, since it is clear that it will not regenerate itself. Everything about us has become small. The gods have abandoned our quarters. They must be purged if the gods are to return. Light cannot enter either the Congress, or the courts, or the parties, as they now stand. Their obtuse short-sightedness prevents their appreciation of historic perspective. It is disgusting to watch the jockeying of some candidacies which only mean to gain the right to preside over maggots feeding on carrion. The time has come to provoke a crisis of State, to impose a fixed-term provisional

regime which shall restore dignity and sovereignty and rally us to the unavoidable task of rescuing our lost nation. The primary constituent will ratify the fundamental agreements for which a consensus exists. I have said it before, and I repeat: It should not be difficult if we appeal to prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance, and if we appeal to democratic Colombians who proudly wish to continuing being both.

Do it, Mr. President. *History is knocking at your door!* Either do it, for the good of Colombia and perhaps for an entire continent afflicted by similar evils, or allow others to do it in the name of a people starved for dignity and justice.

Yours truly,  
Enrique Gómez Hurtado

## 'It will be necessary to carry out a coup'

*The following is the complete translation from Spanish of an interview granted by Enrique Gómez Hurtado to the newspaper El Tiempo of Jan. 13, 1988.*

**El Tiempo:** You propose to install a fixed-term provisional regime. This is a vague formula. What does it mean?

**Gómez Hurtado:** I think the moment has come in which the country has to recognize that its institutions have ceased to exist. It is an act of great contrition, that I think must be carried out, from within, with the greatest legality possible. But for awhile I have been convinced that it is necessary to commit a series of illegalities, because the current legal system does not allow for an appropriate and opportune procedure.

**El Tiempo:** Illegalities of what sort?

**Gómez Hurtado:** I issued a call to the President, who is the person in the best position to put together this fundamental agreement. Once this agreement is reached, it will become necessary to . . . carry out a coup. Because I cannot find another word to substitute for that. We have to make a coup before others make it against us. From wherever.

**El Tiempo:** A coup can only be either military, civil, or civil-military. Which are you proposing?

**Gómez Hurtado:** Civil. Obviously every government must be supported by the military. It should be a civil coup. A coup of both a political and institutional nature. We have to have a strong provisional regime. Dictatorial. This word is also perjorative, but remember that the Romans, the inventors of law, established temporary dictatorships for periods

of great crisis. And with concrete objectives. This would be for a year, which I think is sufficient, during which some six or seven fundamental reforms of the structure of the state would allow it to begin operating again.

**El Tiempo:** Since you are proposing a coup, it should have a *modus operandi*. What is it?

**Gómez Hurtado:** I am not the bell-ringer.

**El Tiempo:** But it is you who are proposing the coup. . . .

**Gómez Hurtado:** I would support using a state of siege regimen, as in a state of war. Where the people can know that, as of a specific moment, there is government here and that the government is authority.

**El Tiempo:** What would you do with Congress?

**Gómez Hurtado:** It would be necessary to dissolve it, to rapidly establish a judicial system using that which can be rescued from what exists, or naming new judges and creating an administration of justice which enables the country to know that here we are going to begin to operate under law, and not *de facto*.

**El Tiempo:** If we speak of a state of siege under a state of war, you are *de facto* proposing military justice.

**Gómez Hurtado:** The justice can be civil. The fact is that justice currently doesn't exist. The constitutional reform, and the judicial reform, which the Supreme Court overturned to defend its privileges, are there. They were discussed, they were approved, they are the fruit of agreement among the parties.

**El Tiempo:** In a word, one must shut down the Court.

**Gómez Hurtado:** It must be shut down, yes. I believe that all the institutions which are not functioning must be shut. The Ministry of Public Works can be left. . . .

**El Tiempo:** And what happens to division of powers? What happens to democracy?

**Gómez Hurtado:** There is no democracy in Colombia. . . .

**El Tiempo:** You speak like the [communist] FARC. . . .

**Gómez Hurtado:** We could have a few points of coincidence, although the origins are different. They say there is no democracy, because they are totalitarian.

**El Tiempo:** You attack López, Belisario Betancur, and speaking of the current campaigns you assert: "The jockeying by some candidacies which only mean to gain the right to preside over maggots feeding on the carrion, is disgusting." A civil coup with that political class is impossible.

**Gómez Hurtado:** I don't believe it is impossible. But I do not believe that one must change Colombians. One must use them, with another system. It disgusts me that such important

people of the parties limit themselves to absolute short-sightedness, without seeing that the general perspective of the candidacies is that of a country which is in an absolute state of dissolution. With these same people, within a different context and purpose, one could undoubtedly reach some general agreements.

**El Tiempo:** Your proposal is that President Barco lead a coup, that he become a dictator, that he shut down Congress . . . and that if he doesn't do it, you say others will. Who?

**Gómez Hurtado:** Someone will do it if the President doesn't. It is better to foresee this.

**El Tiempo:** You say you are a democrat. But it's not clear how you will save [democracy].

**Gómez Hurtado:** In Colombia democracy was already saved once by a military junta that had all the power. And it fixed a term of one year, there was agreement on the fundamentals. The Colombian population submitted. Why not follow the same path?

**El Tiempo:** You are proposing civil war.

**Gómez Hurtado:** We are in a civil war.

**El Tiempo:** No. The population, the country is not involved.

**Gómez Hurtado:** I don't believe it could be bloodier. I believe there will be less violence, fewer people will die, and we will clarify ideas, and will know who is for rebuilding Colombia, and who is for destroying her.

**El Tiempo:** What did your brother say of your letter?

**Gómez Hurtado:** He said to do it, that it seemed good to him.

**El Tiempo:** You criticize the government for criticizing the behavior of the United States. Isn't this interference to you?

**Gómez Hurtado:** We do not have natural law, the ability to argue that sovereignty exists in Colombia. The Supreme Court doesn't have it. The Supreme Court has surrendered to the drug trade. Colombian justice doesn't have it. It has surrendered to the drug trade. Large sections of national territory have surrendered to armies that take orders from abroad. The few surviving corners of sovereignty that remain are the convulsed shards of a shattered State.

**El Tiempo:** Then the United States can make its policy here.

**Gómez Hurtado:** It has the right to protest. . . .

**El Tiempo:** Yes, but this wasn't a simple protest. It was interference. Further, it is Colombians who are dying. Or is it that, according to you, the State has also surrendered to the drug trade?

**Gómez Hurtado:** A good part of it, yes.