
Interview: Maximiliano Londoño



Without decertification, U.S. would be Samper's accomplice

The president of the Ibero-American Solidarity Movement (MSIA) of Colombia was interviewed on Feb. 20 in Leesburg, Virginia, by Nora Hamerman. The interview was first published by the Spanish-language edition of EIR, Resumen Ejecutivo, and appears here in a translation by Mrs. Hamerman. Colombia was decertified by the U.S. on March 1.

EIR: What brings you to the United States?

Londoño: I head the Ibero-American Solidarity Movement in Colombia and also, as you know, I work with *EIR* magazine. The reason I came to Washington, D.C. is to explain to members of Congress and the U.S. government how important it is to decertify Colombia right now.

EIR: What is the issue with "certification"?

Londoño: This has to do with a sovereign mechanism of the United States by which means it indicates whether other nations are cooperating with the United States in the anti-drug battle. Last year, the government of the President of Colombia, Ernesto Samper Pizano, did not receive a full certification, but what was called "national security certification" [of the United States]. That means, that Washington did not want to establish that it was collaborating with the Samper government, but it was not prepared to break connections. Yet in the present circumstances, to grant the same thing—a national security certification—would be a victory for Samper.

EIR: Which is not desirable?

Londoño: No, because what is happening is that there is new proof that makes it clear that this government has been bought off by the drug-trafficking mafia. We ourselves have been warning about this since 1978. I was here at that time talking with congressmen, and since then, ample documentation has been published in *EIR*. Recently this has even been recognized by the U.S. press.

What has happened is the following: Fernando Botero, who was the manager of Samper's election campaign, and then was his defense minister, has stated publicly that, in effect, the Cali [cocaine] Cartel gave money for his campaign, and that Samper knew it. Now, add to this the state-

ments by Santiago Medina, Samper's campaign treasurer, who had already previously decided to cooperate with the prosecution and give information and deliver proof in the same direction, that yes, the drug traffickers had infiltrated the campaign. But besides, on top of this is the information which the United States itself has, which was turned over by Guillermo Palomari, a Chilean who was the Cali Cartel's chief accountant and is now under U.S. protection. So, if the United States were to give Samper's government certification, even if only for national security, this would make it the Samper government's accomplice. And this would send a very clear message not just to Colombia, to those of us who are fighting against drugs, such as Attorney General Alfonso Valdívieso; such as the chief of the National Police, Gen. Rosso José Serrano; such as groups like the one I represent—but it would send a message to other countries, such as Mexico, Peru, Bolivia, Venezuela, where the drug traffickers would think that it is very simple: You just take over the Executive branch and part of a country's Congress, and you can count on the approval of the United States.

EIR: How did Mr. Samper ever get to be Colombia's President?

Londoño: Well, I have explained also to some persons whom I talked to in Washington, that although Samper is "Made in Colombia," in reality he is also a product of the United States. Samper has been sponsored and financed by the libertarian networks in the United States, and it was with their knowledge that he promoted legalization of drugs since 1978, and since that time he has never stopped doing so. At a private meeting which we had with Samper at that time, in Colombia, Samper stated that he was going to be President of Colombia, that this was a project that was going to launch his political campaign. Later he came to the United States on a speaking tour. For more than six months Samper was with various circles that took him all over the United States. I am speaking of people such as those associated with Milton Friedman's policies, for example—and who, like Friedman, have called for legalization of drugs; of those associated with William Buckley of the *National Review*, who also calls for legalizing drugs.

Now there is also George Soros, the financier who has not only sponsored drug legalization, but who unified the whole movement of legalizers in the United States.

We are also talking about the Inter-American Dialogue, this group of people like Brent Scowcroft and Lawrence Eagleburger, who are tied to ex-Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and ex-President George Bush, who are promoting the idea that Colombia has to be certified, because it should not be isolated. These are the folks that have made Samper into a leading figure.

So, just as we are trying to get Samper out of the Presidency of Colombia, well, people are going to have to help us here in the United States.

EIR: What has happened to his opposition? I imagine that Samper has had various opponents.

Londoño: The country is becoming polarized. There are lots of folks who have gone out into the streets, students, housewives. We ourselves—the MSIA—have taken part in these mobilizations, but there is an effort to intimidate people through crimes. For example, Alvaro Gómez Hurtado, who had been the Conservative candidate for President, and used to be the ambassador to the United States, was assassinated last year. And he was strongly campaigning for Samper to be gotten out of power.

EIR: Samper is from the Liberal Party. Are there also opponents inside that party?

Londoño: There is some opposition inside the Liberal Party, although the majority of the Liberal Party has backed Samper, and this has served to keep him in power, because it also controls Congress. Thus, in the last six months, the Accusations Committee in the Chamber of Deputies, which is what formally has to see if there is any basis for a charge, made an investigation and reached the conclusion that there was no merit to the case, and they exonerated him—for the time being. But now, with the new evidence, this process has to be reopened.

But it is not just the case of Alvaro Gómez having been assassinated. For example, Andrés Pastrana, who was Samper's rival in the last Presidential campaign, and who lost the election by a scant margin of 100,000 votes, is in exile here in the United States, because he is under a death threat, and Samper himself let him know that it would be better if he went away. That way, he has fewer opponents.

At the same time, several persons key to the investigation have been assassinated. For example, a few weeks ago, they assassinated Elizabeth Montoya de Sarria, wife of a drug trafficker who is in prison in Colombia. She had been called to testify because there were some tapes, called the "narcocassettes," on which Samper's voice could be heard, along with that of Mrs. Montoya de Sarria. In these "narcocassettes," which circulated a lot in Colombia and abroad, she was making arrangements to channel funds to Samper's

campaign. There was talk of InterBank in Brazil, and of Philip Morris, and it is known that at least \$500,000 from the Philip Morris company went into the Samper campaign.

This Mrs. Montoya de Sarria, who was a very good friend of Samper and a known drug trafficker, was then assassinated. It turns out that, we have just learned, a few days ago, two individuals who were working for this lady's security, were murdered. It has just now been found out that they were connected to her, because at first their bodies were unidentified, and apparently what happened is that they were caught, tortured, and the information was obtained on where the lady was, and then they were killed. Obviously, the testimony by Mrs. Elizabeth Montoya de Sarria would have been devastating for Samper.

We also have the case of the chauffeur of Interior Minister of Horacio Serpa Uribe, who was assassinated last year. It turns out that the chauffeur was a witness to the suitcases in which drug traffickers' money was carried, to be distributed among the Liberal Party's regional campaigns.

So, when we start putting this all together, we see very clearly that although these crimes are unsolved, because their authors are not known, there is a common element, and that is that these crimes are being committed "behind the back" of Samper—just as he has said that supposedly the drug money entered his campaign [i.e., without his knowledge].

Among the latest crimes is the assassination of the son of Gen. Ricardo Emilio Cifuentes, who had just resigned his post. General Cifuentes was the commander of the Second Division of the Army, and he stepped down in protest against the Samper government, saying that he could not take orders from a government he considered unworthy, but that neither did he want to be insubordinate.

If you add to this the intimidation campaign which has gone on against any independent force and against the media, we have a picture of a narco-dictatorship. We are talking about the mafia itself in power. In the specific case of the Ibero-American Solidarity Movement, which I represent, we have constantly been the victims of death threats—one, two, three times a week, by telephone, by fax, by mail, with messages stuck under the door. So it is a very dangerous environment, and my concern is that if the United States fails to understand clearly what the situation is, then we, the best allies which the United States legitimately has in the fight against drugs, will be sacrificed. Because it is also the case that Attorney General Valdívieso, who is doing good work, as well as General Serrano, the chief of police, are also under threat, and the minute the drug traffickers know that it is simply a question of grabbing control of the Executive branch and controlling part of Congress, then the environment is going to be such that they will be able to liquidate these opposing forces.

EIR: Could you talk about the reactions you have gotten

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in Washington?

Londoño: Well, the subject is a very hot one these days. Apparently no decision has been made, but there has been an effort to send messages, which are confusing at a certain point. For example, some say: “No, it is not necessary to decertify Colombia, because it has already been arranged that Samper will go.” This was one explanation that was given. But this is a lie. Somebody ought to find out who was promoting that sort of orientation.

EIR: I have read that line in the U.S. press.

Londoño: Yes, in reality they are echoing what the Inter-American Dialogue is putting out. Sure, there is not a consistent policy from the Clinton administration, which is what one would hope for. On the one hand, clear voices will be heard, such as Undersecretary of State Robert Gelbard, who is the strongest against drug trafficking, and then all of a sudden, other statements will come out of Undersecretary of State Alexander Watson, or Richard Feinberg, of the National Security Council. For example, the latter two persons are associated with the Inter-American Dialogue grouping; Feinberg was its president. So I hope that the discussions I had in Washington in the last few days will bring a lot more clarity into the administration. Because President Clinton himself could be accused of complicity with the Samper government, including going against the law of the United States itself on the certification issue, one of whose points establishes that corruption has to be combatted. And it turns out that here, in the case of the Samper government, it is the government itself, the head of the Executive branch, which is corrupt, and the United States has plenty of documentation of this.

EIR: Is there any historical precedent for the United States decertifying another country, where this has been seen to have generated a positive result, or is this something new in U.S. policy?

Londoño: I think it is important to send this message, since there is a lot of hysteria in U.S. political circles and among the electorate. Some of them even told me, “No, this is your sovereign affair, to see how you are going to solve it”; but look at what happened in Haiti, in Panama, in Iraq. So, it is very possible that those who now say, “No, we do not wish to help Colombia,” etc., will later be the same ones

who are going to demand a George Bush-style military intervention, which would be a complete disaster. . . .

EIR: So this attitude is a bit hypocritical?

Londoño: I know that there are countries with which the United States has no relations, practically, but what needs to be understood is that there are two governments in Colombia. In other words, it is not that the people are born, genetically, to produce drugs. This is something which has been imposed on them. It can be proven with facts.

Ernesto Samper Pizano was secretary general of the Presidential campaign of Alfonso López Michelsen in 1982, when López was trying to get reelected, and it turns out that at that time he had already taken money from the cartel. And when López Michelsen was previously President of Colombia, from 1974 to 1978, with an economic policy of balancing the budget, akin to that of your Newt Gingrich, to cut down inflation, to cut back public spending, he opened the door to drug trafficking and the laundering of drug money. And he left behind his “sinister window” at the Bank of the Republic (Colombia’s central bank), where you could launder dollars without anyone asking any questions. But the economy, and particularly agriculture, went bankrupt, and at the same time, folks showed up, who offered “parallel” seeds and credits, and then *López was part of making the decisions* for enforcing the economic policy of the International Monetary Fund.

In the case of Colombia we have the deal with the Cali Cartel still in force. And what is this deal? It was the same deal that was arranged with the Medellín Cartel:

First, *no* to the extradition treaty. It so happens that Colombia has an extradition treaty extant with the United States, but the law by which it was going to be implemented was thrown out by Colombia’s Supreme Court in 1986, and then by the new Constitution which was drawn up in 1991, in which the extradition treaty was eliminated. But this was after a process of sacrifice and terrible crimes, a process during which hundreds of people were killed, along with policemen who were opposed to handing over the country. So they went so far as to actually change the Constitution, and this was concocted between the drug traffickers and the terrorists, because one-third of the members of the Constituent Assembly were from the M-19 [narco-terrorist band] which had supposedly been amnestied.

So, as I was saying, the first point of the deal—and the Samper government has said it—is that they won't promote an extradition treaty, it's not on the government's agenda.

Second, the drug traffickers enjoy total liberty with respect to their assets and properties: Nobody has touched them, nobody has confiscated this money, and through front men, they continue to enjoy immense power, which serves to blackmail, and to deploy a criminal intelligence and counterintelligence capacity. For example, a little while ago, the Ochoa brothers, the clan linked to Pablo Escobar, several of whom are in jail, celebrated their ownership of a million hectares of the best land in the country. Then, this is the second element that we have, that they enjoy total freedom of their properties.

The third issue is the short sentences which were established, because a penal code was imposed which was fabricated by the drug lords themselves, through their lawyers, a code in which it was established that the maximum punishment for narcotics trafficking—the minimum is four years—could be 24 years. The sentence is doubled if the crime is committed several times, but 24 would be the upper limit. But via plea bargaining, it can be reduced, and it turns out that because of pressure on the prosecutors, this can end up being a sentence of four or five years. Now this is the case for many convicts, such as Juan David Ochoa, who is already about to get out of jail. The same will occur with Víctor Julio Patiño Fόμεque, one of the Cali Cartel members, who was just given a nine-year sentence, but for good behavior he could go free in only six years.

Well, truly this is unjust for Colombia, for those of us who have been fighting. And this is the deal which is in force through the Samper government. That is why we are requesting decertification.

I am aware that decertification has additional implications that will cause some discomfort, but if there is no clear signal, the situation will really be serious.

EIR: Could you sketch out a future for Colombia, *after* decertification?

Londoño: There is a whole, very interesting process, which is that people have started going out into the streets; first they take a little step and then another and then another. So I am beginning to have confidence; it is necessary to defend our own rights. For nearly two decades we have been under oppression and fear in the country. This is starting to be shaken off, people are raising their voices, and that's why there is a great deal of desperation on Samper's part.

The fact is, that Colombia is a country which could be a powerful nation and could contribute to humanity. Just to point to one instance, we have one of the biggest petroleum deposits, which is Cusiana; but a whole zone of the Andes mountain range has immense oil potential. Now it was always said that because of lack of money, we could not do big infra-

structure projects, and it turns out now that we are going to have a huge dollar income because of this. But now what they have told us is that this money has to be taken away and lent to the foreign banks because it would cause us inflation, a supposed Dutch disease, so say the dogmas of Milton Friedman. So before, it was because we did not have any money, and now our problem is having too much. But for this reason we are not going to build the ports, the airports, the highways, the railroads we need.

But meantime, the British—who, by the way, have been defending Samper—are also taking control of Colombia's coal and oil, and the United States is not even aware of these matters. We have 40% of our trade with the United States, but if this relationship with the British goes ahead from the economic standpoint, because structurally it has existed for some time, within a few years Great Britain is going to be the principal trading partner not just of Colombia, but of many nations of Ibero-America. This is not just a business affair, but has to do with how the British look at the map.

EIR: What role could the Armed Forces have in the healthy future of the country, in its development?

Londoño: They don't have a legal framework for acting, in terms of the legal code or the Constitution. It is very sad that, for example, more than 13,000 narco-guerrillas have been apprehended and turned over to the authorities, and yet practically none of them are in jail nor even tried, because there is no defined crime. It turns out that now, to assassinate someone, to kidnap someone, are not crimes, but simply a form of political dissidence.

The whole idea of dialogue with the guerrillas, supposedly applying the El Salvador model, and in reality the methodology of the United Nations, is terrible for our countries, because they are undermining every principle of authority; and the military is very demoralized because, for example, all these non-governmental organizations, these NGOs, such as Americas Watch or Amnesty International, have launched a slander campaign with the aim of destroying the military forces, and this has been expressed in various ways in Colombia's case, as well as in other countries.

It is as though, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, according to the outlook of groups like the Inter-American Dialogue, the enemy, which used to be communism, supposedly no longer exists, and so the Army has no more reason to exist. Then they say that we are in a global world in which what will be required are rapid deployment forces, to which a contingent will be contributed to the United Nations and some gendarmes to watch over the tourists, to control the situation.

This is madness, because besides dissolving the nation-state, what is being done is to surrender justice to private interests. And then we have the drug lords' armies, we have narco-guerrillas, armies of common gangsters, and the Army—which is supposed to be the legitimate Army—is not

given any ability, either political or legal, to establish or to reestablish the principle of internal authority.

All the recommendations which have been made—for example, the Inter-American Dialogue talked about the collective defense of democracy. And it turns out that there are two axioms which they are promoting: One is free trade, and the other is democracy, but behind democracy, in fact, what is being imposed is a version of a dictatorship.

Why? Because it is believed that the enemy is the Armed Forces. This is what is being proposed by the United Nations and by some of these NGOs, and they recommend cutting down on the size of the armies, changing their role and turning them into ecologists, dedicating them to other activities. And in reality they are creating more problems.

In the case of Colombia, all the recommendations which these outside groups made, have been accepted. First they said that we needed a civilian defense minister, and this was done. Traditionally, the defense minister had been the highest-ranking military man because we were at war, a war against the guerrillas, and this way the President could be competently advised. Of course, the appointment was up to the President; it was not established that it *had* to be a military man, but just that one supposes that if there is a fire, you call the fireman, because he knows about such things; I am not going to call somebody who has no familiarity with the subject. So it was done, and they also put a civilian in as deputy defense minister, who controls all the related activities. Then we have had a process of privatization of the industries which were associated with the military sector and of some businesses, such as those which managed the retirement funds. Overall, this is going to destroy the very conditions of basic social services for the military. It turns out that the World Bank has set up controls which the Finance Ministry exercises over public spending, so that the military does not exceed its budget. Already, for example, they cannot conduct any secret operations, or even any intelligence gathering of a confidential nature. So there is no capacity for intelligence or counter-intelligence.

The National Planning Department has already replaced, so to speak, the high command and the General Staff in terms of formulating defense policy. And it turns out that we have a group of bureaucrats, most of them educated at Harvard, who establish what has to be done in the country.

And now we have in all the military garrisons a large number of military prisoners. At this time, there are more judicial casualties than combat casualties! I mean, there are more military men with legal proceedings against them than who have fallen in combat. This has destroyed morale.

There was also a reform to destroy the penal code. First with the Constitution of 1991, because this is imbued with a Jacobin, individualist, “human rights” flavor; it is the second longest constitution in the world. We have a list of nearly 100 articles dedicated to rights, but there is not one duty. But then,

the Constitutional Court itself established that, in lieu of the military tribunal, the military code, through which the duty an Armed Forces member is evaluated when there is something to be investigated, this new code says that the civilian courts could and should do that. . . .

EIR: The military officer who headed the anti-terrorist war in Medellín, in his book, recounts that he started his career as an engineer, building roads and other infrastructure, and it struck me that this may be an important task for the military in Colombia, for the country’s development.

Londoño: Yes, there are zones where virtually the only presence is the military, which although only sporadically, has to not only respond to security problems but also help by building local roads, bridges, and so forth. This is something that has to be salvaged and defended.

It is starting to be clear that the Armed Forces do not exist because there are communists or other threats, but because there are nation-states. In other words, because they are part of the pillars to preserve national sovereignty. Clearly if we are in a one-worldist scheme, where they say there are no nations, then they are going to say, “no, we are not going to need armies.”

But what they are proposing is a world empire.



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