

**Speech by H.E. Mauricio Baquero Pardo, Chargé d’Affaires
e.p. to the Republic of Singapore, on the celebration of the
Colombian National Day. Park Royal Hotel at Pickering,
July 20, 2017**

**Mr Amrin Amin,
Parliamentary Secretary,
Ministry of Home Affairs and Ministry of Health**

**Mr Sitoh Yih Pin and Mr Murali Pillai
Members of Parliament**

**Excellencies, members of the diplomatic corps,
Distinguished guests,
Estimados Connacionales,
Ladies and gentlemen**

Welcome to the celebration of Colombia’s National Day. We are celebrating today the Two hundred and seven (207th) Anniversary of our Independence.

I want to thank the presence of Mr Amrin Amin as our Guest of Honour and the Members of Parliament who are representing the Government of Singapore. I also want to thank to all of you for being here this evening.

This has been a very positive year for Colombia and very productive for the bilateral relationship with Singapore.

I would like to start by sharing with all you that the oldest internal conflict in Latin America has come to an end. After almost five years of negotiations, the Colombian Government and the FARC signed a Peace Agreement last September.

This Peace Agreement was submitted to a plebiscite in October, and after drafting some necessary adjustments, the Congress of the Republic of Colombia approved, by a large majority, the New Peace Agreement.

Thanks to the tireless work, dedication and conviction of the negotiating teams and to the permanent support of the International Community, these efforts will place Colombia into a new era of peace and development.

Entering into the post conflict phase, the Peace Agreement is already showing results.

Since the beginning of the bilateral and definitive cease-fire some months ago, there has not been a single confrontation between our Military Forces and the members of the FARC.

More importantly, there has not been even one incident or attack against the civilian population.

More than seven thousand FARC men and women have demobilized and have been allocated in 26 areas with the accompaniment of the UN Mission and under the protection of our armed forces.

The complete and final disarmament of the FARC has also advanced successfully. The 27th of June 2017, will be remembered as the day that the FARC exchanged their bullets and weapons for words. **FOTOS en PANTALLA**

More than seven thousand registered arms are now in 44 containers and 8 storage areas under the supervision of the UN Mission.

Soon, they will be able to defend and express their ideas peacefully and in a free way as a political party, in the Congress and other scenarios contemplated by our democracy.

Many areas require immediate attention. But probably the most urgent one is the reintegration of these men and woman to civil life.

The Government has allocated important resources to full fill what has been agreed.

At the same time, the international community, recognizing the efforts made by the parties involved and the importance of this Agreement, has created four multilateral funds.

A few days ago, the UN Security Council approved, unanimously, a Resolution for a new political mission in Colombia, to verify the implementation of several measures of the Agreement, including political, economic and social reincorporation of the FARC.

This is again a big demonstration of trust and a major support from the international Community to the peace process and to the Agreement.

As the President of Colombia says: *“Peace is the road to reconciliation, to opportunities, to development, to tranquillity and to a more solid and deep democracy. ... Peace summons us all”*

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests

Three years ago, I was designated by my Government as Chargé d’Affaires e.p to Singapore to open the Colombian Embassy and to strengthen and deepen the bilateral relationship that was stablished in 1982. Next December will be our thirty-fifth Anniversary.

We recognize the importance of Singapore; its potentialities, its experience and determination as a multi-cultural and multi-religious state and as an example of hard-working and peaceful integrated society.

We also see the City-State as model of sustainable development, economic growth, productivity and innovation.

Colombian delegations, from a wide range of sectors and industries, such as construction, IT Communications and software; infrastructure, mining, education and Centres of Innovation and health industry, all have come to explore the opportunities that Singapore has to offer.

More and more Colombian companies are looking for new markets and Singapore and South-East Asia are very much in their radar.

Likewise, Singaporean companies like Changi Group, Surbana Jurong, EDIS, ST Electronics, are seeing Colombia as a potential destination for business projects.

We are working closely with IE Singapore, EDB, Singapore Cooperation Enterprise, URA, PSA as well as the relevant Singaporean Ministries to strengthen commercial and investment ties.

Colombia is now, more than ever, a country of opportunities!!!

At this point, I want to reaffirm our commitment to free trade, to open markets and the need to facilitate trade and investment.

Colombia has a very attractive business environment, with a competitive legal framework and it is well interconnected to the world economy.

According with UNTACD, in 2016, we were the third most attractive country in Latin America for foreign investors, bringing more than Thirteen thousand five hundred (US\$ 13, 500) millions of dollars into our economy.

Investment in tourism and restaurant industry has increased seven hundred per cent (700%) since 2010.

So, this is a great opportunity for me to renew an invitation to all of you to visit my country. You will discover an arising, vibrant, diverse and totally different Colombia.

Important magazines and publications like Lonely Planet, The Guardian, Le Monde, Forbes, Daily Telegraph and Bloomberg, are positioning and recommending Colombia as a great destination.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Cultural diplomacy has played an important role to introduce Colombia to Singapore.

We certainly believe that Culture is a strong instrument and perfect ingredient to understand each other better.

During the past months, we have brought talented artists, musicians and chefs. We have recently hold, with a big success, the First Colombian Film Festival in Singapore.

We also commemorate the 50th Anniversary of One Hundred Years of Solitude, the Master Piece of our Nobel Prize Winner Gabriel García Marquez, and we donated some special editions to the National Library of Singapore and to the YALE-NUS College.

In the months ahead, we will bring a photographic exhibition; some contemporary writers and a soprano that is shining in some of the most demanding scenarios around the world.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to conclude these remarks making special reference to the Pacific Alliance Summit that took place a few weeks ago in Cali, Colombia.

The Heads of State and Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Perú gathered to give a new impetus to this integration initiative that, so far, has proven to be very effective and attractive.

The PA has Fifty – two Observer States and now, Singapore, Australia, Canada and New Zealand have taken a very important step in Cali towards becoming Associated States, which is a new category created very recently by the PA.

Being Associated State implies the negotiation of a binding agreement of high economic and commercial standards with the Pacific Alliance.

These are great news!!! In times of pessimism and when streams and winds of protectionism are blowing and making noise, the Pacific Alliance, is firmly convinced that we should deepen our commercial, economic and cooperation relationship with other partners, particularly, in this part of the world.

Therefore, Colombia, as Pro-Tempore Presidency of the PA, welcomes this significant step taken by Singapore and we look forward to working closely to advance the negotiations ahead.

We are very much confident that our bilateral relationship will become stronger and stronger in the years to come.

We will continue opening spaces for collaboration and cooperation and reinforcing our political, commercial, economic and cultural ties.

Thank you very much.

After the National Anthem of Singapore, I would like to propose a toast to H.E. Mr Tony TAN, President of the Republic of Singapore and to the people of Singapore.

To the President and People of Singapore.