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United States of America

**DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**



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## **Secretary Gutierrez and Delegation of U.S. Officials Visit Medellin, Colombia and Meet with President Uribe to Discuss Trade Agreement**

**MEDELLIN, COLOMBIA**—Secretary of Commerce Carlos M. Gutierrez today led a U.S. Congressional delegation to Medellin, Colombia, to discuss how increased trade has helped boost prosperity and improve security in the Andean region. He stressed that the trade agreement with Colombia would continue to improve economic growth and security for both nations.

"Increased trade along with social and economic reform have helped Medellin and all of Colombia make extraordinary strides in reducing violence and promoting peace, justice and prosperity," said Gutierrez. "Violence is down and hope is rising here in Medellin and in the Andean region. The Colombia trade agreement will help an important ally continue to improve stability in our hemisphere while removing barriers for U.S. business and agriculture. Passage of the Colombia agreement is an opportunity we must take to strengthen our bilateral relationship."

"Congress has already given Colombian exporters free access to the U.S. market. With this trade agreement, Congress can give U.S. exporters the similar free access to the Colombian market," added Gutierrez.

Since 1993, more than 90 percent of Colombian exports to the United States have benefited from duty-free treatment as a result of the Andean Trade Promotion and Drug Eradication Act (ATPDEA) and the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) approved by Congress. Both were renewed in 2006. Colombia's economy and quality of life have benefited from ATPDEA and GSP, and has recently seen significant improvements in security. According to the State Department:

- Terrorist attacks dropped from 1,645 in 2002 to 646 in 2006.
- Homicides dropped 40 percent from 2002 to 2006.
- Kidnappings dropped 76 percent from 2002 to 2006.

The Colombia trade agreement would provide U.S. exporters expanded access to the Colombian market, allowing U.S. businesses and agriculture to enjoy the same duty-free access to Colombia's growing market as Colombia has to the U.S. market under ATPDEA and GSP, providing American workers and businesses similar benefits already enjoyed by Colombian workers and businesses.

The United States is Colombia's leading trade partner, accounting for 39.6 percent of Colombia's exports and supplying 26.5 percent of the country's imports in 2006. Colombia-U.S. bilateral trade has almost doubled over the past decade, from \$9 billion a year in 1996 to approximately \$16 billion in two-way trade in 2006, due in large part to the ATPDEA. Colombia is currently the 29th largest export market for U.S. goods.

In Medellin, the delegation met with labor leaders, members of the business community and the "demobilized," individuals who have renounced violence and are working to reintegrate into society.

The countries with which the United States implemented free trade agreements represent just 7.5 percent of global GDP, yet more than 42 percent of all U.S. exports are headed to the United States' 14 trade agreement partners. Last year, U.S. merchandise exports to the 11 countries with which the United States implemented trade agreements between 2001 and 2006 grew four percentage points faster than they did to the rest of the world. Exports to those 11 countries grew at 18.1 percent while exports to the rest of the world grew at 14.2 percent.

The U.S. delegation is as follows: Rep. Rodney Alexander (R-LA-5), Senator Bob Bennett (R-UT), Rep. Joseph Crowley (D-NY-7), Rep. David Dreier (R-CA-26), Rep. J. Dennis Hastert

(R-IL-14), Rep. Ruben Hinojosa (D-TX-15), Rep. Gregory Meeks (D-NY-6), Rep. Jim McCrery (R-LA-4), and Boston Mayor Thomas M. Menino (D).

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