

COMMEMORATION OF THE NATIONAL DAY OF THE REPUBLIC OF COLOMBIA

Statement by Ambassador Alvaro Sandoval Bernal

Oslo, July 20th, 2016

Distinguished Ambassadors and other Heads of Mission, distinguished colleagues from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, esteemed fellow Colombians and dear friends.

On a day like today in 1810, and on par with similar movements in Latin America and the Caribbean, the Colombian emancipation process that culminated in 1819 began in Bogota, with the definitive declaration of independence.

In these two centuries, the Republic of Colombia, has traveled complex paths and overcome extreme challenges, which, thanks to the vigor of its people and the stability of its institutions, place it today as the fourth largest economy in Latin America and the 31st largest GDP in the world, based on a PPP valuation.

Colombia, the second most biodiverse country on the planet, has given birth not only to illustrious poets and writers such as Jorge Isaacs, José Eustasio Rivera, Porfirio Barba Jacob, Alvaro Mutis and García Márquez, and philosophers such as Rafael Gutiérrez Girardot, Nicolás Gómez Dávila and Estanislao Zuleta, but also to prominent scientists and researcher, including: Julio Garavito, celebrated astronomer whose work on lunar fluctuations and their influence on climate behavior, as well as on the Earth's orbital acceleration, earned him the honor of having a crater on the moon named after him; Rodolfo Llinas, renowned neuroscientist, who formulated "*Llinás' Law*", a paradigm of current neuroscientific studies, and, on commission by NASA, has studied the behavior of the human brain in outer space; Jorge Reynolds, inventor of the first external artificial pacemaker; Solomon Hakim, discoverer of "Normal Pressure Hydrocephalus Syndrome" , inventor of a special valve for its treatment; and Adriana Ocampo, Lead Program Executive at NASA for Space Missions "New Horizons", and "Juno", the exploratory probes to Pluto and Jupiter respectively.

Colombian painters and sculptors have also enriched the art world, with such famous figures as Fernando Botero, Alejandro Obregón, David Manzur and Enrique Grau, amongst many others.

The commemoration in 2016 of the National Day of the Republic of Colombia is of particular historical significance, because this will be the year in which the Final Agreement will be signed between the Government and FARC-EP, in order to end the prolonged conflict and to allow for peace and reconciliation to begin. Norway's role in that achievement has been essential as a facilitator State, as well as Cuba's as a guarantor State and Chile and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela as companion States respectively. Our gratitude to Norway will be permanent, not only because the peace process formally started in Oslo, but because of the prudent, measured and very relevant facilitation of the Norwegian delegates has helped to overcome critical moments and contributed to the desired arrival at the port of peace and reconciliation.

Meanwhile, strengthening the business relationship of Colombia and Norway has been sponsored by the entry into force in 2014 of the Free Trade Agreement between the Republic of Colombia and the EFTA States. Norwegian presence and investment in Colombia is increasingly evident.

These are all causes for celebration and hope, on the journey of a nation that is overcoming its challenges.

For Colombia, Norway and all of you, a toast of friendship and fraternity.

Thank you.

I would also like to invite you to try some of the samples of Colombian cuisine that we brought before you today, from different parts of the Colombian territory: "*Lechona Tolimense*" from the central Department of Tolima; a Shrimp Cocktail from the Atlantic coast and the traditional Colombian "*Empanadas*".