



Message from
His Excellency John Dew,
British Ambassador to the
Republic of Colombia

HE John Dew
speaks at the
British Embassy
in Bogotá

Ten years ago the Colombian government organised a major event in London on the theme “Why Colombia?” There were good answers then. There are even better answers now. Colombia has come a long way in ten years, and I believe will go a lot further in the next ten.

Britain is already a significant partner in Colombia. We are the second biggest foreign investor after the US. Our most significant sectors are mining, financial services and beverages. In the last two years, the range of UK businesses entering the market has diversified, with a greater focus on technology and services. A big draw is the positive business environment: Colombia has been highlighted by the World Bank as a ‘top reformer’ in five of the last eight years. President Santos is serious about completing the challenging journey to OECD membership. That will put Colombia alongside Mexico and Chile,

as one of the leading free and open market economies in the region.

It is therefore no surprise that UK exports are increasing. The 30 per cent growth in 2010, which has been sustained into 2011, highlights the speed at which our trading relationship is changing. But we need to do much more. To succeed in turning our own economy round we have to make a bee-line for where the growth opportunities are. Today this emphatically includes Colombia, with growth forecast to be 5 per cent in the immediate future. We do not have the field to ourselves, and need to get in quickly and decisively.

Colombia has enormous potential and substantial resources; above all it has hard working and adaptable people. UK companies in Colombia frequently highlight the quality of Colombian managers. It is one factor behind the recent decisions by several leading UK companies (including Catlin and Wood

Group) to use Colombia as a base for the wider region. Even further afield, there are many examples of UK companies using Colombian talent to lead their operations in third countries. At the same time there are growing people-to-people links, especially in higher education. Last year the UK was the leading destination for those Colombian post graduate students in receipt of prestigious Colombian government scholarships, outstripping the US for the first time.

Realising the potential means turning around exactly the major problems the government has in its sights. These include transforming the quality of education and attitudes to innovation, building a modern infrastructure of ports and transport, finding the way to



manage a massive expansion in oil and mining that is compatible with global leadership on environmental and bio diversity issues, revolutionising the way land is used and managed to become a major food producer and exporter and modernising the tax and justice systems, to mention only a few.

We should strongly welcome the Government's determination to tackle the inequality, poverty and insecurity. Colombia has the advantage of some strong, vital institutions, which have been tested severely over the last thirty years. For example, many Colombians believe that the Constitutional Court saved the country from grave political risk when it ruled out a third term for the then President last year. The key thing is that, despite the reservations of some, the judgement was immediately accepted. Colombia has fought a long tough battle against major drug cartels, with help from her friends. It is not over, but Colombia's determination and hard won credibility now underpin her increasing capacity to help others in the region fight their own battles.

The tough issues, including human rights, are being addressed. Colombia's courts and prosecution authorities are now, week by week, tackling the legacy of the past. A national human rights conference is set for December 2012. The implementation of the new law on compensating victims of the conflict and restoring stolen land will address some fundamental problems. It will take time, but public opinion in Colombia is taking human rights issues increasingly seriously and the political context has changed significantly for the better.

These are just some of the reasons for business in Britain to choose Colombia, and ensure we make the most of the opportunities open to us. There is no better time than now, with President Santos in London this month. E



Message from His Excellency Mauricio Rodríguez-Múnera, Colombian Ambassador to the United Kingdom

The visit to London by the President of Colombia, Juan Manuel Santos, at the invitation of Prime Minister David Cameron, will mark the beginning of a new era of relations between the United Kingdom and my country.

On 21 and 22 November, President Santos will meet British leaders in several areas of mutual interest for both nations: trade, investment, the environment, education, science, social matters, security and tourism. These encounters will result in the diversification, strengthening and deepening of our important bilateral relations in these topics.

Colombia is advancing rapidly in the right direction. A vibrant democracy, economic success, social progress and institutional development are taking place in a nation that 15 years ago was experiencing very difficult times. The intelligence, courage and perseverance of our recent leaders, with the support of the vast majority of Colombians, have made these very impressive improvements possible.

The UK Coalition Government, led by Prime Minister David Cameron and Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg, has understood very well that Colombia is today a country that presents many attractive opportunities for enhanced engagements in different aspects. And President Santos knows that the United Kingdom is a key ally to help us achieve our goals of peace and prosperity for all.

Since they began almost 200 years ago, relations between the United Kingdom and Colombia have always been very friendly. I have no doubt that after this visit they will continue to grow and, in the coming years, will reach such a closeness that citizens from both nations will enjoy benefits from these two wonderful societies. E