



Foreword by
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FIRST

It gives me great pleasure to introduce this Official Report on the Republic of Colombia to mark the State Visit of President Juan Manuel Santos to the United Kingdom. Lord Hurd, Lord Cormack and I are especially grateful to His Excellency Néstor Osorio, the Colombian Ambassador, and his Embassy staff for all their help and guidance in the preparation of this report. We are also very grateful to President Santos for contributing such an important and personal interview and to the Prime Minister, Rt Hon Theresa May MP, for her significant message.

This State Visit is particularly timely and will help focus the attention of business leaders and policy makers on the many opportunities that exist in Colombia. The visit is of special significance given that it is the first State Visit to the United Kingdom by a President of Colombia. The State Visit also takes place at a crucial moment for the peace negotiations – for which the President recently won the Nobel Peace Prize.

The strength of the United Kingdom’s partnership with Colombia was underlined by the successful visit by HRH The Prince of Wales and HRH The Duchess of Cornwall in October 2014. The Prime Minister also recently announced that Britain would continue to support Colombia in its peace negotiations both through diplomatic channels and by building on the strong bilateral relationship.

President Santos is a particularly welcome guest to the United Kingdom having spent almost ten years living here, both as a student at the London School of Economics, and later as economic adviser to the International Coffee Organisation, based in London.

Colombia is the third largest country in Latin America with a population of over 48 million people and its economy is currently the 28th largest in the world. It has low and stable inflation, increasing foreign direct investment, and an open economy with foreign trade worth 29 per cent of GDP. Colombia enjoys significant energy and

mineral resources including gold, silver, emeralds and platinum. It is the world’s fourth largest coal exporter and is Latin America’s fourth largest oil producer.

President Santos has focused foreign policy on promoting Colombia’s international commercial ties – Colombia has signed, or is negotiating, free trade agreements with over a dozen countries and is a founding member of the Pacific Alliance trading bloc as well as undertaking the process of OECD accession. Expanding trade and investment links with trading nations such as Colombia is playing an important role in the British Government’s post-Brexit referendum trade strategy.

The United Kingdom is the second largest investor in Colombia after the United States with expanding exports in whisky, pharmaceuticals, machinery and chemicals. Colombia’s economic development provides important opportunities for further strengthening the bilateral business relationship. Priority sectors include transport, construction, education, oil and gas, science and innovation, mining and financial services.

A central theme of this State Visit is the development of the peace process and the President’s commitment to this work. ‘I will not give up, I will keep seeking peace until the last minute of my term’ he stated in October. As part of the State Visit, President Santos will visit Northern Ireland, given its ‘importance as a model of peace and reconciliation.’

The State Visit of President Santos to the UK, while providing an opportunity for private discussions, will give us all an opportunity to study the important developments in Colombia and to weigh carefully the opportunities for both countries to work together even more closely.

We at FIRST are delighted to have been asked to produce this publication to mark the President’s State Visit and hope that it contributes, in a small way, to its success and the further development of the bilateral relationship, especially in the area of trade and investment.