The Carter Center strives to relieve suffering by advancing peace and health worldwide; it seeks to prevent and resolve conflicts, enhance freedom and democracy, and protect and promote human rights worldwide.
Experience of Binational Dialogue

Ecuador–Colombia, 2007–2009

Final Report

THE CARTER CENTER

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Contents

Foreword ............................................................. iv
Executive Summary ............................................... v
Acknowledgments .................................................. vii
List of Abbreviations ............................................... 1
  Background ....................................................... 2
  First Meeting: Initiate Conversation, Atlanta, November 2007 ......................... 4
  Second Meeting: Spirit of Joint Enterprise, Quito, February 2008 ...................... 6
  Angostura Events Cause Diplomatic Crisis, March 2008 ............................... 7
  President Carter Conducts First Mediation Exercise, March–April 2008 .......... 8
  Third Meeting: New Level of Openness, Bogotá, April 2008 .......................... 11
  Fourth Meeting of the Binational Dialogue Group, Atlanta, May 2008 .............. 13
  President Carter Conducts Second Mediation Exercise, May–June 2008 .......... 13
  Binational Dialogue Group Meets with the Presidents, June 2008 ................... 15
  Initiatives of the Binational Dialogue Group in Civil Society, June–October 2008 .. 15
  Fifth Meeting: Political Analysis, Quito, November 2008 ........................... 18
  Initiatives on the Common Border, February 2009 ...................................... 19
  BDG Meets with President Rafael Correa, Quito, March 2009 ....................... 20
  Visit by President Carter to Ecuador, Quito, April 2009 .............................. 21
  Sixth Meeting: Review of Group’s Progress, Bogotá, May 2009 ..................... 22
  Binational Dialogue Group, June–October 2009 ....................................... 23
  Carter Center Conducts Third Mediation, April–August 2009 ...................... 24
  Final Road to Full Relations ..................................... 27
The Binational Dialogue Group in the Words of its Members ........................... 29
  Adrián Bonilla .................................................. 29
  Antonio Navarro Wolff ........................................ 31
  Augusto Ramírez Ocampo .................................... 34
  Dolores Padilla ................................................ 38
  Francisco Carrión Mena ....................................... 40
  Gonzalo Ruiz Alvarez ......................................... 42
  Grace Jaramillo ............................................... 47
  Luz María Sierra .............................................. 50
  Guillermo Rivera .............................................. 52
  Luis Carlos ...................................................... 53
  Villegas Echeverri ............................................. 53
  Manuel Chiriboga Vega .................................... 54
  Margarita Carranco .......................................... 57
  Patricia Estupiñán ........................................... 60
  Pedro Velasco ................................................ 62
  Ricardo Ávila ................................................. 64
  Ricardo Estrada ............................................... 66
  Sandra Suárez ............................................... 70
  Socorro Ramírez ............................................. 72
  Alfredo Negrete .............................................. 74
  Andrés Valdivieso ......................................... 77
  Galo Mora ...................................................... 79
Selection of Articles, Interviews, and Press Notes by the Members of the Binational Dialogue Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uribe in Montecristi</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandatory Courtesy Toward Colombia</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correa Is Not Chávez’s Pawn</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our Relations with Colombia</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Border Will Be Threatened Again</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Return to Political Ethics</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thank You, Mr. Carter</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Signs Between Colombia and Ecuador</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shooting Ourselves in the Foot</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Imperative Reconciliation</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Country to the North</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hope for the President to Remain Silent</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deaf and Blind</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Binational Tension</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drums of Peace</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Contributions of the Binational Dialogue Group:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brief Final Thoughts</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact on the Context</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Words</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix: Time Line</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B: Initial Project Framework</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C: Communication Between Diez and Foreign Minister Araujo</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix D: Final Agreement on Small Steps</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix E: Final Document on Signals</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix F: Declaration on Ecuador–Colombia Relations</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix G: Conclusions from the Third Binational Dialogue Round Ecuador–Colombia</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix H: Press Release, June 6, 2008</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix I: Press Release, June 27, 2008</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix J: Agreements Reached During the Meeting in Quito</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix K: Sixth Meeting of the Binational Dialogue Group</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix L: Modifications to Road Map</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix M: Joint Communiqué Ecuador–Colombia</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Carter Center was privileged to work with a distinguished group of citizens from Ecuador and Colombia in an experiment to improve understanding between the two countries. Our goal was to help mitigate growing tensions between citizens on both sides of the border and to focus on the positive ties that bind the two countries.

When Ecuador severed diplomatic relations with Colombia on March 3, 2008, just days before our third planned meeting of the Binational Dialogue Group, we thought the exercise would be imperiled. The group mobilized, however, and some of its members played an invaluable role in advising my personal communication with President Correa and President Uribe in an attempt to repair relations. Over the course of the next year, the dialogue group worked tirelessly, not only for the re-establishment of diplomatic relations but for collaborative efforts for development and security of the border region.


We also benefited from the financial support of the Andean Development Corporation and the wise counsel of its president, Enrique García.

We are pleased to present this report in the wake of the announcement on Nov. 26, 2010, that both governments have agreed to re-establish full diplomatic relations. We hope that the personal insights gained and shared by the members of the Binational Dialogue Group continue to nourish the relationship between the people of Colombia and Ecuador.

Former U.S. President
Founder of The Carter Center
Executive Summary

The Binational Dialogue Group was a diplomacy initiative from civil society, organized by The Carter Center and the United Nations Development Program. The goal of the group was to contribute to improved relations between Colombia and Ecuador by promoting a positive agenda.

As with many relationships between neighboring countries, the bilateral relation between Ecuador and Colombia undergoes frequent ups and downs. In 2007 the national security policy of President Álvaro Uribe and instances of fumigation with glyphosate conducted by the Colombian government in regions bordering Ecuador to eradicate coca crops produced growing tensions between the two countries. In addition to this, the influx of Colombian emigrants into Ecuador (appreciably, due to the violence that Colombia was suffering) and the differing political orientations of President Rafael Correa and President Uribe contributed to the straining of binational relations even further.

The BDG initiative involved gathering a group of 20 individuals to influence public opinion and contribute to public policymaking in both nations. These individuals were associated with political and academic circles, the business sector, civil society organizations, and the media. They were invited to share their opinions and perspectives on binational relations in a friendly, relaxed, informal atmosphere with the idea that, later on, all of them would influence their respective areas of action. Thus, the initiative may be described as the creation of a binational network of individuals with the capacity to wield positive influence on relations between the two countries. The selection of group members was considered a crucial matter. In doing so, special attention was paid to the leadership, influence, and ideological diversity of the members. It was also deemed important that there be representatives of the provinces or departments within the group from both sides of the common border.

The BDG was formed according to the mode of diplomacy known as Track 1.5 (governmental diplomacy is termed Track 1 and citizen diplomacy or diplomacy of civil society organizations is termed Track 2). This designation implies that the group conducts its activities in an independent, autonomous manner but also in association—and in direct contact—with both governments. Therefore, in order to join the group, members could not hold official political office at that time. Group members called upon to serve in public office had to yield their position to another individual. Because this was a “diplomacy 1.5” initiative, it was well-known to the foreign ministries of both countries from the outset and to both presidents as well, and it met with their approval.

The group held six two-day meetings between November 2007 and May 2009: two in Atlanta, (United States), two in Quito (Ecuador), and two in Bogotá (Colombia). Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter participated in two of these meetings. BDG members had the opportunity to meet with President Uribe on one occasion and with President Correa on another. After May 2009 national groups kept in contact, and the exchanges among members from both countries continued in support of strengthening the ties and the improvement of relations among neighbors.

Following the group’s second meeting, relations between the two countries took an abrupt turn as a result of the incursion of Colombian military forces into Ecuadorian territory to bomb a FARC camp in the town of Angostura on March 1, 2008. This episode culminated, two days later, in a severing of diplomatic relations, which shook the binational relationship at all levels. This shift led the BDG to rethink its original objectives and to slightly modify its activities, which continued nonetheless.

Among other tangible achievements attributable to BDG activities, newspapers and magazines from both
nations invited columnists and opinion leaders of their neighboring countries to work together. As a result, the binational agenda (which had focused earlier on security issues) ostensibly broadened to include matters of cultural cooperation, cross-border development, etc. Moreover, members produced a television documentary dealing with the subject of the binational relations from a positive perspective and aired it in both countries. Other members organized a meeting that gathered political authorities and representatives from the cross-border communities, departments, and civil society organizations to discuss the border situation. Members of the BDG also contributed to the development of binational cultural and academic activities.

In this context, in tandem with and independently of BDG activities but with the advice of some of its members, The Carter Center undertook a series of actions that led to a lowering of tensions and drew the political positions of both nations closer together. These activities were discreet, did not reach public opinion, and included mediation by President Carter. The efforts of The Carter Center and the mandate of the Organization of American States to devise confidence-building mechanisms resulted in Ecuador and Colombia announcing the re-establishment of diplomatic relations at the level of chargé d'affaires in November 2009.

Section 1 of this publication presents a summary of BDG activities and the parallel mediation initiatives carried out by The Carter Center in the diplomatic crisis between the two countries.

Section 2 compiles the testimonies of BDG members from both nations. The testimonies were written after the fact expressly for this publication. BDG members concur overall that, despite the proximity and historic ties between the two nations, there is profound, widespread ignorance regarding the situations in the respective neighboring country. Moreover, they underscore the value, opportunity, and usefulness of the initiative and how important it was for them to hear “the other version” of history and to “put themselves in the shoes of the other.” Many express that the dynamics created in the group and the results obtained exceeded their initial expectations, and they stress that its effect extends in time beyond the group’s formal existence.

Section 3 collects a selection of articles written by BDG members and published in the two countries’ various print media to address issues relevant to bilateral relations and often to deal with BDG activities directly or indirectly. Some of these articles were also published in the print media of the neighboring country.

Section 4 presents some tentative conclusions about the scope and impact of the initiative.

The publication also includes a series of documentary appendices dealing with BDG activities and the mediation and rapprochement efforts made by The Carter Center in the context of the diplomatic crisis following the events in Angostura.
The life and soul of the Ecuador-Colombia Binational Dialogue Group come from its members, a group of dedicated and experienced citizens from each country committed to learn from one another and to disseminate that knowledge to improve the relations between the two societies, especially the lives of those in the border zone.

The members included, for at least some portion of the project, from Ecuador: Adrián Bonilla, director of the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO); Francisco Carrión Mena, former foreign minister; Ricardo Estrada, executive director of the Corporation for Promoting Exports and Investments; Galo Mora, presidential adviser; Alfredo Negrete, deputy director of the newspaper El Comercio; Dolores Padilla, former legislative representative and candidate for vice president; Gonzalo Ruiz, news director for the television network Gamavisión; Andrés Valdivieso, adviser to the Ministry of Government; José Valencia, former director of Participación Ciudadana and coordinator of the International Relations Program at FLACSO; Grace Jaramillo, director of the International Relations Program, FLACSO; Patricia Estupiñán, general editor of Revista Vistazo; Margarita Carranco, president of the Ecuadorian Association of Women in Municipal Government and second vice president of the Municipal Council of the Quito Metropolitan District; Manuel Chiriboga Vega, director of the Foreign Trade Observatory and former chief negotiator of the Free Trade Agreement between Ecuador and the United States; and Pedro Velasco, former mayor of Tulcán.

From Colombia, the members included: Ricardo Ávila, director of Portafolio; Angelino Garzón, governor of Valle del Cauca; Claudia Guriatti, director of the program “La Noche” on the RCN television network; Antonio Navarro Wolff, governor of the border department of Nariño; Rafael Nieto Loaiza, former vice minister of justice and journalist; Socorro Ramírez, professor of the Institute of Political Studies and International Relations at the National University of Colombia and an expert on Colombia-Ecuador relations; Augusto Ramírez Ocampo, former foreign minister and director of the Institute of Human Rights and International Relations at the Universidad Javeriana; Guillermo Rivera, legislative representative for the border department of Putumayo; Sandra Suárez, former minister of environment, housing, and land development and former presidential high counselor for Plan Colombia; Luz María Sierra, chief of editing at Revista Semana; and Luis Carlos Villegas, president of the National Business Association of Colombia.

The group would not have been created without the insight and support of two key individuals. Conversations in May 2007 between René Mauricio Valdés, then U.N. Development Program (UNDP) resident representative in Ecuador, and Francisco Diez, then Carter Center senior adviser based in Latin America, identified the tensions building between Ecuador and Colombia over complex interactions at the border, including the environmental effects of Colombia’s fumigation policy, the presence of the FARC guerrillas across the border, and the displacement of Colombians affected by violence resulting in a large number of refugees in Ecuador.

They believed and convinced Dr. Jennifer McCoy, director of the Carter Center’s Americas Program, that conflicting perceptions and interpretations about realities at the border and within each country would lead to an escalation of the conflict and negatively impact the ability of each government to attain its own goals of strengthening democracy and economic well-being within its society.

The Carter Center and UNDP agreed to cosponsor the dialogue group under the auspices of a regional cooperation framework agreement signed by then-director of the Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean Rebeca Grynspan and former U.S.
President Jimmy Carter in mid-2007. The Carter Center and UNDP jointly sponsored four meetings of the dialogue group in 2007 and 2008. The Carter Center then joined with the Andean Development Corporation (CAF) to co-sponsor another two meetings of the group in 2009.

The Carter Center would like to thank the collaboration of UNDP resident representatives René Mauricio Valdés in Ecuador and Bruno Mora in Colombia, and their teams, during this project. The support of CAF President Enrique García and Director Juan Pablo Guerrero was invaluable to the continuation of the project.

We also benefit from the evaluation and separate report produced by the UNDP’s Democratic Dialogue Regional Project that identifies useful lessons for anyone involved in dialogue processes.

The Center acknowledges the important role of the Organization of American States, and particularly Secretary-General José Miguel Insulza and Undersecretary Victor Rico, in establishing confidence-building measures and contributing to the re-establishment of diplomatic relations.

This report, which focuses not only on the evolution of the Binational Dialogue Group but also the efforts of President Carter to facilitate communication between President Correa and President Uribe to eventually re-establish diplomatic relations, has benefited from the efforts of many people. Initial drafts were written by Francisco Diez and Cecile Mouly; Jennifer McCoy and Camila Lanusse edited and updated the report; many members of the dialogue group contributed their own reflections; Sarah Bellamy translated the report into English, and Rodrigo Soto edited the Spanish version; and Karin Andersson managed the production of the report.

Finally, The Carter Center acknowledges its staff and field representatives without whom the project would not have been possible: Francisco Diez, Kelly McBride, Andrea Durango, and Cecile Mouly.
# List of Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AEDEP</td>
<td>Association of Publication Editors of Ecuador</td>
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<td>ALBA</td>
<td>Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America</td>
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<td>AMUME</td>
<td>Ecuadorian Association of Women in Municipal Government</td>
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<tr>
<td>ANDI</td>
<td>National Business Association of Colombia</td>
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<tr>
<td>APEC</td>
<td>Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation</td>
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<tr>
<td>BDG</td>
<td>Binational Dialogue Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>CAF</td>
<td>Andean Development Corporation</td>
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<tr>
<td>CAN</td>
<td>Andean Community of Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>COPIAF</td>
<td>Commission on Border Issues and Colombo–Venezuelan Integration</td>
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<tr>
<td>CORPEI</td>
<td>Corporation for Promoting Exports and Investments</td>
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<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>FARC</td>
<td>Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia</td>
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<td>FLACSO</td>
<td>Latin American School of Social Sciences</td>
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<td>FLACSONET</td>
<td>The Andean Virtual Network for the Latin American School of Social Communication</td>
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<td>FNPI</td>
<td>Foundation for New Journalism</td>
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<td>FTA</td>
<td>Free Trade Agreement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fundamedios</td>
<td>Andean Foundation for Media Observation and Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICC</td>
<td>The International Criminal Court</td>
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<tr>
<td>IDB</td>
<td>The Inter-American Development Bank</td>
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<tr>
<td>IEPRI</td>
<td>Institute of Political Studies and International Relations at the National University of Colombia</td>
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<td>M-19</td>
<td>The 19th of April Movement</td>
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<td>OAS</td>
<td>Organization of American States</td>
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<tr>
<td>OBANPEX</td>
<td>Andes Monitoring Center for Foreign Policy</td>
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<tr>
<td>ONUSAL</td>
<td>Observation Mission of the United Nations in El Salvador</td>
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<tr>
<td>PDA</td>
<td>The Alternative Democratic Pole</td>
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<td>PRDD</td>
<td>Democratic Dialogue Regional Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>RCN</td>
<td>Broadcast network Radio Cadena Nacional</td>
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<tr>
<td>U.N.</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNASUR</td>
<td>The Union of South American Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</td>
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<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>ZIF</td>
<td>Border Integration Zone</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This report reviews the history of the Ecuador–Colombia Binational Dialogue Group from the group’s inception in mid-2007 through its closing meeting in Bogotá in May 2009, as well as some of the additional actions taken by the members of the group after its formal existence had concluded. In parallel fashion, the report describes the mediation efforts of former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and The Carter Center from the beginning of the diplomatic crisis between these two countries, which occurred in March 2008, through the partial re-establishment of relations with the exchange of chargés d’affaires in September 2009.

BACKGROUND

The binational political relationship between Ecuador and Colombia has unfolded over a backdrop of highs and lows. Two nations that share an extensive common border of 586 kilometers have watched their story shift between engagement and disengagement over their shared objectives and internal problems that cross their geographic boundaries.

Their status as neighbors and their shared language and culture have fostered commercial, cultural, economic, and social ties between the peoples of Colombia and Ecuador. The two countries were the leading actors behind the creation of the first border integration zone under the Andean Community of Nations in the 1990s. Opportunities for integration have not been immune to contamination by each country’s internal problems, however. These internal issues surpass geographic borders and create tensions that in turn increase the probability of crisis between the two countries. Additionally, the efforts that had been under way to promote social, economic, and environmental development were accompanied by an increasing displacement of Colombian refugees into Ecuador. These migratory flows intensified in 2000 because of Colombian internal conflict, with a resulting socioeconomic impact in Ecuador. The official efforts to control illegal activities at the border were running parallel with the incursions of the guerrilla groups, such as the FARC, into Ecuadoran territory in pursuit of supplies and rest.

Today, relations between Ecuador and Colombia cannot be understood without recognizing that their dynamic is determined by two distinct visions of their security agendas. For Colombia, its internal conflict extends beyond its borders, whereas Ecuador has maintained the position of not getting involved in the internal problems of its northern neighbor.
The differing perspectives on how to address border security issues had caused tension between Quito and Bogotá in the past. For example, tensions rose in 2005 when representatives of the Ecuadoran government demanded that Colombia suspend use of glyphosate in fumigations in its southern departments until they could determine the chemical’s effects on the health of people living in the Ecuadoran provinces bordering the Colombian departments Nariño and Putumayo, where the coca plant is grown.2 In mid-2007, Colombia decided to increase manual coca eradication to reduce its use of glyphosate. Relations between Quito and Bogotá experienced a moment of calm; signs of tension began to reappear, however, related not only to the fumigation issue but also reflecting a new political context.

Following the inauguration of President Rafael Correa in January 2007, Plan Colombia—the Colombian security and development plan, begun in 2000—was met by a proposal from the new government in its neighbor to the south. The administration of President Correa launched its own security agenda via Plan Ecuador for the Northern Border. Plan Ecuador is an action plan to promote economic and social development for the Ecuadoran border population. Its launch in April 2007 before a watchful international community—including The Carter Center—created anticipation that the new Ecuadoran government would try to respond in a new way to the security policy of its northern neighbor.

It was in this context that The Carter Center and the United Nations Development Program began to explore the idea of promoting a binational dialogue initiative. The dialogue aimed to establish a creative forum for citizens without governmental responsibility and to promote understanding between the societies and an agenda of cooperation between their governments that would allow them to jointly address their serious problems. Given the ideological background and the characteristics of both governments, it was clear to the leadership of both organizations that an increase in tension between the two countries was a real risk, although they did not predict the eventual break in relations.

After several conversations, The Carter Center and UNDP defined the characteristics of the project, and the Center drafted a summary document designed to offer an initial outline of the exercise3. Prior to beginning to contact potential members, they shared the idea with both governments and received explicit approval from both foreign ministers. Parallel to the selection process for potential candidates to join the group, the organizers held high-level informal meetings with both governments—not to request their authorization but to make sure that neither of them would feel uncomfortable with the final composition of the group.

Ultimately 20 citizens, male and female, from the two countries agreed to join the initiative. They had a high level of leadership, were ideologically diverse, and were committed to dialogue. Two specific personal criteria were sought: that they had direct access to the highest levels of government (but not responsibility for political decision-making in their country) and/or that they had the ability to influence public opinion in their country.

The organizing institutions proposed that these citizens commit to participating in four meetings. Each meeting would last for two full days. The first would take place in mid-November 2007 at the Carter Center headquarters in Atlanta. Each member received from President Carter a personal letter of invitation to this meeting. The other three meetings would be held in Quito, in Bogotá, and finally in

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2 In January 2006 the Colombian government agreed to respect a fumigation buffer zone extending 10 kilometers from the border; 11 months later Colombia resumed spraying with glyphosate and Ecuador announced that it would file with The Hague tribunal a complaint against its neighbor. A few days later, on Jan. 9, 2007, Ecuador presented in the OAS a complaint against Colombia for its fumigations at the border.

3 Included as Appendix B.
Atlanta once again.

One objective of the process was to create a balanced, open, and safe environment for interaction between the citizens of both countries. This space would allow them to explore the state of bilateral relations and to propose initiatives to make constructive changes to them. It was planned that each member of the group could carry out concrete actions within his or her own sphere of action and influence. In addition, the intention was to help inform the decision-making of the governments, without committing them to anything.

The purpose was to open up a space that had not previously existed in bilateral relations. The space would be noncommittal and outside the public eye, but potentially it could be useful for exploring and developing initiatives that would contribute to mutual understanding, to the production of mutually positive public images, and to the promotion of coordinated policies.

The initial group comprised the following:

From the Ecuadoran side:
- Adrián Bonilla (director of the Latin American School of Social Sciences [FLACSO])
- Francisco Carrión Mena (former foreign minister,
- Ricardo Estrada (executive director of the Corporation for Promoting Exports and Investments [CORPEI])
- Galo Mora (presidential adviser)
- Alfredo Negrete (deputy director of the newspaper El Comercio)
- Dolores Padilla (former legislative representative and candidate for vice president)
- Gonzalo Ruiz (news director for the television network Gamavisión)
- Andrés Valdivieso (adviser to the Ministry of Government)
- José Valencia (former director of the NGO Participación Ciudadana [Citizen Participation] and coordinator of the International Relations Program at FLACSO)

From the Colombian side:
- Ricardo Ávila (director of the magazine Portafolio)
- Angelino Garzón (governor of Valle del Cauca)
- Claudia Gurisatti (director of the program “La Noche” on the television channel Radio Cadena Nacional [RCN])
- Antonio Navarro Wolff (governor of the border department of Nariño)
- Rafael Nieto Loaiza (former vice minister of justice and journalist)
- Socorro Ramírez (professor of the Institute of Political Studies and International Relations at the National University of Colombia and an expert on the Colombia–Ecuador subject)
- Augusto Ramírez Ocampo (former foreign minister and director of the Institute of Human Rights and International Relations at the Universidad Javeriana)
- Guillermo Rivera (legislative representative for the border department of Putumayo)
- Sandra Suárez (former minister of environment, housing, and land development and former presidential high counselor for Plan Colombia)
- Luz María Sierra (chief of editing at the newspaper Revista Semana)
- Luis Carlos Villegas (president of the National Business Association of Colombia)

First Meeting: Initiate Conversation, Atlanta, November 2007

The first meeting of the Binational Dialogue Group began under the leadership of President Carter in November 2007 at the Carter Center headquarters.

4 In alphabetical order from each country. The Colombian group had 11 members, after Dr. Luis Carlos Villegas, one of the first invited to participate, was able to arrive during only the latter part of the first meeting. He decided to personally finance his participation from that point on.
in Atlanta. The facilitators from the Center and the UNDP focused on providing a safe space so that the members of the group could present their points of view, which in many cases were in direct opposition with one another.

The purpose of this first meeting was to encourage the individuals to define themselves as a group and to initiate conversation about their differences based on mutual respect and honesty, with the characteristics of a truly productive dialogue. As the meeting developed and the different national perspectives were expressed, emotions, opinions and perceptions surfaced, sometimes in open confrontation and sometimes in harmony. All the participants spoke from the standpoint of the country they represented, and all listened to the other members. From these conversations, the facilitators extracted a list of obstacles and opportunities for the bilateral relationship that was reviewed and polished and that served as the meeting’s concrete result:

Areas of Concern and Differences
• Distorted images and mutual lack of understanding: Lack of efficient channels for handling problems as they arise. Ideology becoming involved in addressing certain issues. The role of the media and opinion makers (xenophobic images).
• Security and drug trafficking:
  Different conceptualization, different foci, and different scenarios. Lack of comprehension of the efforts being made and of the internal operating dynamics. Insufficient information. Lack of trustworthy or effective communication channels. Increasing money-laundering activity. Absence of mutual recognition and lack of coordination of actions.
• Situation of abandonment of the binational border:
• Refugees and migrants:
  Reasons, costs and dynamics of migration. Lack of understanding of a complex phenomenon and lack of reliable information.
• Role of other countries:
  The decisive influence of the United States on Colombia’s views on security and drug trafficking. Differences. Publication of controversial statements by Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez. Poor identification of shared strategic partners (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, Amazónicos, European Union, etc.)

Opportunities or Areas of Possibility to Diversify and Desecuritize the Binational Agenda
• Mechanisms for dialogue and communication:
  – Promote specific mechanisms for dialogue and cooperation between the presidents, mid-level officials, local and regional governments, as well as actors from civil society (business owners, unions, churches, academic institutions, etc.).
  – Increase group members’ ability to influence their respective governments, as well as public opinion, at the local, binational, and international levels.
  – Identify proposals for nongovernmental actions that the group can promote.
  – Connect social actors and leaders outside the governments.
  – Generate cultural events.
  – Generate items in the media and work with opinion makers to change perceptions.
• Binational cooperation and commerce:
  – Highlight existing binational agreement on issues concerning the international agenda.
  – Highlight smooth institutional cooperation on judicial and police matters.
  – Identify new world markets to explore together.
  – Identify joint investments and opportunities for infrastructure development.
  – Incorporate entrepreneurs/investors from both countries.
• Development and integration on the border:
  – Obtain trustworthy, firsthand information by involving local actors. Bring together representatives from the three border provinces of Ecuador and the two border departments of Colombia.
  – Generate sources and information that will be
accepted by both parties (e.g., create a common “census”; share statistics on migration; create human development indexes for the border zone in both countries; replicate on the Colombian side the study that the Ecuadoran U.N. system completed on the Ecuadoran side).
- Identify and promote joint national and binational projects for economic development, promotion of human rights, and protection of the environment (develop a “positive agenda,” review the ZIF, etc.).
- Binational agreements between the governments (recover and evaluate what already exists):
  - Agreement on the border integration zone.
  - Identify other binational/government instruments for coordinated action.
  - Seek opportunities for strengthening institutions in both countries.
  - Launch joint actions that demonstrate political will and can serve as signals to advance on binational agreements.

The environment offered by The Carter Center and the two intense days shared in Atlanta were the point of departure for an individual process of comprehension and openness for each member of the group. In the following months, various participants published editorials and opinion pieces on bilateral relations in a variety of media outlets and shared the experiences and knowledge they had gained with people in their respective governments. In late November 2007, Álvaro Uribe was the only foreign president who attended the opening ceremonies of Ecuador’s Constituent Assembly.

In December, José Valencia was appointed as Ecuador’s vice minister of foreign relations, which forced him to step down from the Binational Dialogue Group. At the proposal of the Ecuadoran members of the group and following the same consultation process with the government, new members were added. Margarita Carranco, president of the Ecuadoran Association of Women in Municipal Government and second vice president of the Municipal Council of the Quito Metropolitan District, and Manuel Chiriboga Vega, director of the Foreign Trade Observatory and former chief negotiator of the Free Trade Agreement between Ecuador and the United States, were invited to join the group. They both accepted.

At the meeting in Atlanta, the group agreed to hold the second meeting in Quito Feb. 1–2, 2008. After the first meeting, the facilitators began to use e-mail to circulate a proposal for focusing the energy of the second meeting on the items on the “positive agenda” between the two countries. The group members enthusiastically supported the idea, with the shared sense that there was a positive outlook for relations between their two countries.

SECOND MEETING: SPIRIT OF JOINT ENTERPRISE, QUITO, FEBRUARY 2008

As previously agreed, group members reunited in February 2008. This time they met in Quito, in an environment marked by the cordial relations between the two neighboring countries.

The mood of the second meeting was completely different from the earlier meeting in Atlanta. Confidence had been established between the BDG members, and their comprehension of each other’s realities — as well as their understanding of the perceptions they had of one another — began to improve. As part of the meeting, a visit to the border between the two countries had been planned and organized by UNDP-UNHCR. Weather conditions in Quito forced the cancellation of the flight to Sucumbíos, however. Instead of the border visit, a United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees official who had significant experience with the border zone offered a presentation on the situation of Colombian migrants in Ecuador, and a representative from the Foreign Ministry of each country presented official positions.

5 The group included “advisers” who had no decision-making ability, such as Galo Mora or Andrés Valdivieso, but not sitting officials who would be committing the government when they spoke.
toward the border zone. This focus on a shared reality fostered a spirit of joint enterprise. The group generated a substantial amount of ideas and identified concrete initiatives to improve relations between the two countries. At the end of the meeting, participants agreed to hold the next round of binational dialogue in early April in Bogotá.

Shortly after the Quito meeting, two Ecuadoran members withdrew from the Binational Dialogue Group: Alfredo Negrete, for professional reasons and Galo Mora, after being named minister of culture.

**Angostura Events Cause Diplomatic Crisis, March 2008**

A month after the meeting in Quito, and while the members of the group worked to activate their plans for the “positive agenda,” tensions between the Colombian and Ecuadorian governments suffered an escalation that would lead to a major diplomatic crisis.

The Colombian government’s military operation against a clandestine base camp of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia on Ecuadoran territory in the locality of Angostura on March 1, 2008, had a negative impact on the two countries' bilateral relations. The Ecuadoran government viewed the armed incursion as an attack on its territory. Bogotá justified its actions as being in its own “legitimate defense.”

Two days after the event, diplomatic relations between the two countries were severed. In this context, some of the group members began to communicate informally to assess the seriousness of the situation and its possible consequences.

The diplomatic crisis was addressed with urgency and efficiency by the Latin American presidents during the summit of the Río Group, which took place in Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic. After the meeting, Secretary-General of the Organization of American States José Miguel Insulza traveled to Quito and Bogotá as part of a Good Offices Mission, which he headed. In each city, he met with the members of the Binational Dialogue Group, who shared their evaluation of the situation with him. Many of the initiatives supported by the secretary-general coincided with the recommendations presented by the group.

Because of the delicate situation between the two countries, the third binational meeting was postponed. Some Ecuadoran members of the BDG felt it was unacceptable even to think about going to the “aggressor” country, and communication froze even within the group. In light of this situation, The Carter Center arranged for national group meetings in each country and a trip to Quito so that

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6 Ambassador Jaime Barberis, deputy secretary of national sovereignty and border relations in the Ministry of Foreign Relations of Ecuador, and Ambassador Ricardo Montenegro, director of territorial sovereignty in the Ministry of Foreign Relations of Colombia.

7 During the attack the FARC second in command, “Raúl Reyes,” was killed. Twenty-five other people who were present in the guerrilla base camp also died as the attack occurred, including one Ecuadorian citizen.

8 The president of Ecuador considered the incursion to be an act of aggression on his territory and ordered a military investigation. The day after the events in Angostura, the Ecuadoran government demanded a “formal apology” from Colombia, compensation for damages, and a promise that attacks by the Colombian armed forces on Ecuadoran territory would not be repeated. Bogotá’s response was that it had not violated the principle of sovereignty, and it justified its actions as being in its own “legitimate defense.” The Colombian government announced that it had found information proving there were “ties” between Ecuadoran government officials and the FARC. The countries withdrew their ambassadors, and Ecuador ordered a mobilization of troops to the border.

9 On March 7, 2008, during the summit of the Río Group, Colombia issued an apology in writing and promised not to violate the sovereignty of other countries again.

10 The OAS Good Offices Mission was in Ecuador and Colombia from March 9, 2008 through March 12, 2008.
three Colombian delegates could speak with their Ecuadoran counterparts; it also arranged a meeting with Ecuadoran Foreign Minister María Isabel Salvador and her vice minister (and former BDG member), José Valencia.

The meeting gave the Colombian members a better understanding of the impact of the events on Ecuador’s society and government, and it allowed the Ecuadoran members to overcome their reservations about going to Bogotá. After their conversations, the decision was made to reschedule the third binational meeting for April 23–24, 2008.

**President Carter Conducts First Mediation Exercise, March–April 2008**

The fact that the Binational Dialogue Group initiative was created in constant consultation and communication with the governments of Colombia and Ecuador—as well as amid open channels among the highest levels of government, the group members, and Carter Center officials—provided the political room and legitimacy for President Carter to attempt to mediate between the two countries.

To address the diplomatic crisis, President Carter contacted President Correa and President Uribe by phone to evaluate the situation with each of them and offer them any assistance they required from the space created by the BDG.

During the conversation between President Carter and President Correa, which took place in late March, the latter directly stated his interest in having Carter communicate points of vital importance for Ecuador to President Uribe. Presidents Correa and Carter agreed that Foreign Minister Salvador would send Jennifer McCoy, director of the Americas Program at The Carter Center in Atlanta, a document with five concise points, after which President Carter would call President Uribe. The five points that Ecuador proposed to the Colombian government were:

1. Recognize Ecuador’s efforts made to control its border and to combat guerrillas and drug trafficking.
2. Order that no more documents will be leaked to the press by the Colombian government about the computers that allegedly belonged to Reyes, as well as no more statements by Colombian government officials about information that has not been verified according to due process.
3. Turn in to the Ecuadoran government, as it agreed to do at the summit of the Río Group, the information contained on the computers seized by the Colombian forces during the incursion on March 1, 2008.
4. Commit to adopting the necessary measures to protect the binational border, with Colombian military and police forces exercising the greatest control to prevent the passage of irregular groups and goods or organized crime into Ecuador.
5. Express Colombia’s willingness to recognize the damages owed to the relatives of the Ecuadoran citizen Aisalia, who was killed in the March 1 bombing during the incursion onto Ecuadoran territory, which violated the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ecuador.

In a conversation with President Uribe, President Carter explored Uribe’s reactions to the proposal and found that he was considerably open to them. So Carter proposed that the Carter Center staff continue to work on the subject with Uribe’s foreign minister, Fernando Araujo. President Uribe accepted, and Foreign Minister Araujo got in touch with Dr. McCoy. They agreed to arrange for Francisco Diez to travel to Bogotá on March 31, 2008. This move was the beginning of the first confidential mediation exercise conducted by The Carter Center to encourage the re-establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. The Center’s negotiations 11 Antonio Navarro Wolff, Augusto Ramírez Ocampo, and Socorro Ramírez were the delegates.
The Carter Center

Binational Dialogue: Ecuador–Colombia

began after regional opinion was signaled in the OAS meeting of foreign ministers, which made a public statement, at Ecuador’s request, about the Angostura bombing and paved the way for negotiations under the good offices of the OAS secretary-general or other third parties.

Working from The Carter Center, McCoy and Diez planned a series of talks for Diaz with both governments (“shuttle diplomacy”). The first visit would be with Foreign Minister Araujo to explore the possibilities for Colombia to satisfy the requirements Ecuador had expressed in its five-point document. Diaz later scheduled a trip to Quito to meet with the foreign minister and, if possible, with President Correa. If the talks were productive, he would plan another trip to Bogotá to meet with President Uribe. The first step was to send identical letters to both foreign ministers in order to establish a common framework for the negotiations.

Diez consulted with Colombian BDG members Augusto Ramírez Ocampo and Luis Carlos Villegas, before and after his meetings with the Colombian government, given the diplomatic experience of the former and the closeness to President Uribe of the latter. Diez was also in constant contact with Francisco Carrión Mena and Adrián Bonilla on the Ecuadoran side. The counsel and guidance of the BDG members, as well as their active participation in the exercise that followed, proved exceptionally valuable.

On March 29, 2008, during his weekly Saturday radio broadcast, President Correa announced that Ecuador was preparing a “severe response” for Colombia. Aware that the conditions for starting negotiations looked, to say the least, menacing, Diez arrived in Colombia on March 30 for his meeting with Foreign Minister Araujo.

Meeting with Foreign Minister Fernando Araujo, March 31, 2008

Diez’s conversation with Foreign Minister Araujo was positive, frank, and open. They explored the points Ecuador had raised. The foreign minister warned that everything could change depending on the “severe response” announced by Correa, however. They agreed that it was virtually certain that a dispute would be filed against Colombia in the International Criminal Court in The Hague for the fumigations at the border. Indeed, this announcement came at midday on March 31, 2008. It changed the setting for negotiations. After consulting with Ramírez Ocampo and Villegas, Diez opted to propose a confidence-building exercise. Before traveling to Quito on the same day, he drafted a proposal and sent it to Foreign Minister Araujo, who promised to offer his response promptly.

Among other relevant points of the proposal,12 it called for agreeing to a “truce on negative or inflammatory public statements about the other country” for 10 days and giving “a chance to the informal, unofficial, and discreet efforts of The Carter Center with the support of the Binational Dialogue Group” as well as forming a working group with four members of the binational group—two Ecuadorans plus Villegas and Ocampo from Colombia—so that during those 10 days they can work productively with Vice Foreign Minister Valencia and Vice Foreign Minister Reyes in order to identify small steps and possible signals for both governments to build confidence, along with the essential conditions for re-establishing diplomatic relations.” This effort could complement the formal negotiations through the OAS to build confidence on the security issues between the two countries.

Meeting with Foreign Minister María Isabel Salvador, April 1, 2008

Minutes before the start of the meeting with Foreign Minister Salvador in Quito, Foreign Minister Araujo called Diez to convey his support for the exercise. The conversation with the minister and her vice

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12 The proposal he sent is attached as Appendix C.
foreign minister (a former member of the BDG), José Valencia, lasted for almost two hours and was enormously helpful for understanding the complexity of the conflict from the Ecuadoran side. At the end, she agreed to let Diez present to President Correa the proposed exercise, which was defined as “small steps to rebuild confidence” and had already received approval from Colombia. Valencia offered Diez useful advice on how to approach the core concerns for Ecuador and for President Correa, who met with Diez and the Ecuadoran foreign minister in the presidential palace.

Meeting with President Rafael Correa, April 1, 2008
The meeting with President Correa lasted longer than expected and helped establish a strong sense of empathy. Much of what had been learned in the dialogue with the members of the BDG seemed to be focused on the perceptions and positions of the president, while his view of the internal Colombian conflict lacked the comprehension that had been achieved through interaction with members of the group. Still, President Correa went beyond expressing his support for pursuing the proposed exercise; upon learning that Diez would be returning to Colombia and would be seeing President Uribe, Correa also insisted that his desire to resolve the situation as quickly as possible, to maintain a fluid dialogue between the presidents, and to maintain the best relations for the benefit of their peoples be conveyed by Diez.

After the meeting with Foreign Minister Salvador, Diez wrote up the document containing the planned methodology for carrying out the “small steps.” This document included the involvement of four members of the BDG working together with the vice foreign ministers of both countries to identify signals that could be simultaneously sent to build confidence.

Meeting with President Álvaro Uribe, April 3, 2008
Once in Bogotá, Foreign Minister Araujo met with Diez in the presidential palace. Presidential adviser Jorge Mario Eastman was also present. President Uribe’s reaction to the message from his Ecuadoran counterpart was not positive, and the meeting lasted longer than expected. At President Uribe’s request, and in order to meet his agenda, the conversation was interrupted for a little over an hour and then continued for another two hours.

Again, the lessons about the Colombian context from the BDG sessions, as well as the recommendations of Villegas and Ramírez Ocampo, were essential to understanding the concerns and priorities of the president and securing his agreement for the proposed exercise. Finally, with a small modification, Uribe gave his approval of the document and the exercise it proposed to carry out.

The text proposed an agreement that “there will not be negative public statements” by high-ranking officials in both governments for 10 days (beginning April 4) and that during this period an informal, unofficial, and discreet negotiating effort by The Carter Center and the Binational Dialogue Group would begin.

Writing the Signals for Confidence Building, April 4–6, 2008
Immediately after the meetings with the officials, the process of drafting the signals for confidence building began. The binational team identified the “signals” that could be sent successively between the governments over the coming day. This took place in two steps: first, at the Foreign Ministry in Bogotá with Colombian Vice Foreign Minister Camilo Reyes and the active collaboration of Augusto Ramírez Ocampo; second, at the FLACSO headquarters in Quito, with Ecuadoran Vice Foreign Minister José Valencia and the active participation of Adrián Bonilla. The time line was worked on in great detail, and both sides approved the result.

As was planned in the agreement, President Carter called both presidents and confirmed that they would fulfill their commitment.

The Failure of the Initiative
During the week of April 7 both governments meticu-
The third group meeting took place in Bogotá, April 26–29, 2008, in the middle of the diplomatic crisis. The meeting was the setting for a profound and sincere exchange of the emotions and perceptions of group members. The group itself changed during this meeting; the members reached a level of openness and comprehension of one another’s perspectives that was powerful enough to foster internal changes in each of the participants.

The Ecuadorans explained the depth of the wound left by decades of territorial conflict concerning the border with Peru and how much the concepts of territorial integrity and respect for sovereignty and national dignity mattered to them—hence the extent of the impact of the events of March 1, 2008.

The Colombian group, whose members represented a wide range of ideological perspectives, explained to their Ecuadoran counterparts the drama of the violence that has been perpetrated in their country for more than four decades by illegal armed groups. They went on to describe the effects, at all levels of Colombian society, of living in a climate of insecurity and fear throughout their daily lives, hence the importance of the struggle against the FARC and how much it means for Colombia to achieve security.

In addition, as part of the activities that took place in the meeting, the group shared a lunch with Colombian Foreign Minister Araujo and a breakfast with the Colombian Senate’s Commission for Peace.

Third Meeting: New Level of Openness, Bogotá, April 2008

The third group meeting took place in Bogotá, April 26–29, 2008, in the middle of the diplomatic crisis. In order to preserve the confidentiality that The Carter Center had promised to maintain, and given that its name was mentioned in various articles, the Center released a press statement in order to draw the matter to a close. The statement clarified the Carter Center’s role as a facilitator as well as the desire of both governments to continue receiving its assistance. In order to contribute to the efforts subsequently promoted by the OAS, the information about the Carter Center’s negotiations was passed on to the secretary-general of the OAS once both countries felt it was appropriate. It was in this context that the third round of dialogue for the BDG was scheduled to take place a few days later.
Participants in the fourth round of binational dialogue between Colombia and Ecuador, which took place in Atlanta in May 2008, included the following (named from back to front): Michael Brown (UNDP—Ecuador); Angelino Garzón; Hrair Balian (director, Carter Center Conflict Resolution Program); Dolores Padilla; Luis Carlos Villegas; Bruno Moro (U.N. resident coordinator—Colombia); Luz María Sierra; Ricardo Ávila; Guillermo Rivera; Gonzalo Ruiz; Francisco Carrión Mena; Claudia Gurisatti; Rafael Nieto Loaiza; Graciela Tapia (UNDP—DDRDP); Oscar Sánchez (UNDP—Colombia); Kelly McBride (Carter Center, Ecuador); Francisco Díez (Carter Center representative, Latin America); Carlos Vergara (UNDPA); Ricardo Estrada; Augusto Ramírez Ocampo; Antonio Navarro Wolff; Socorro Ramirez; Andrea Durango (Carter Center Americas Program associate); President Carter; José Miguel Insulza (OAS secretary-general); Jennifer McCoy (director, Carter Center Americas Program).
The most useful aspect of the official meetings was an extended working session with the presidential adviser on government communications, Jorge Mario Eastman, who listened to the group members attentively and responded with sensitive clarity and detail to all of the questions about the security policy of the Colombian government.

The BDG decided in this meeting to exert its influence through a formal gesture, by composing a letter addressed to both presidents urging them to restore diplomatic relations. The members committed to collecting signatures from prominent individuals from both countries to support this petition over the coming month before the fourth meeting scheduled to take place in Atlanta in late May 2008. The evaluation revealed a high level of support for continuing with the dialogue process over the long term. The BDG members agreed on the possibility of planning an agenda of concrete items for a second phase of work after the fourth round of dialogue, which was scheduled to take place in Atlanta a month later.

Fourth Meeting of the Binational Dialogue Group, Atlanta, May 2008

The fourth binational dialogue meeting took place in Atlanta May 23–24, 2008. José Miguel Insulza (secretary-general of the OAS), Rebeca Grynspan (regional director for Latin America and the Caribbean for the UNDP), and President Carter were in attendance.

Before this meeting, President Carter considered the escalation of aggressive public statements between representatives of both governments and placed a call to President Correa to explicitly ask if he still supported the Binational Dialogue Group’s work to improve binational relations and to get his perspective on the conflict.

President Correa’s positive responses about the BDG paved the way for a new round of dialogue, in which the group members developed a plan of action of concrete initiatives designed to strengthen ties between the two countries. They proposed a deadline for the collection of supporting signatures from leaders and for sending the letter to the presidents. The group also requested meetings with both executives and high-ranking officials in each government. They decided to produce a binational documentary to be broadcast on television that would reflect the process of understanding that the members of the BDG had experienced during the dialogue process. In addition, they proposed to organize academic forums and promote binational events with different sectors of the population.

In the realm of bilateral relations between Colombia and Ecuador, the OAS had been continuing its good offices negotiations, and the vice foreign ministers of both countries had continued working discreetly, finding solutions to some of the problems related to security on the shared border. Based on this, President Carter included the question of whether the Ecuadoran government would consider the possibility of re-establishing relations “at the level of chargé d’affaires” in the discussion points for President Correa.

President Carter Conducts Second Mediation Exercise, May–June 2008

The communication between former President Carter and the Ecuadoran president took place near the
beginning of the BDG meeting. To everyone’s surprise, President Carter reported that President Correa had responded that he was ready to re-establish relations at the level of chargé d’affaires. Because the conversation was in English, it seemed possible that there had been some confusion over terms, and therefore, it was decided that it would be best to confirm this. José Miguel Insulza encouraged The Carter Center to verify Ecuador’s decision, conveying his hope that it was so.

When Foreign Minister Salvador was contacted by phone, she responded that she was not fully apprised on the matter. A new trip to Quito on May 28 was scheduled for Diez. Meanwhile, The Carter Center and the BDG decided to hold two additional binational meetings of the Dialogue Group in Quito and Bogotá during the coming months.

Once in Quito, Diez joined Foreign Minister Salvador in a meeting with President Correa. President Correa confirmed that he had told President Carter that his government was ready to re-establish diplomatic relations with Colombia at the level of chargé d’affaires. He stressed that this step would have to be arranged with complete confidentiality until it was finalized and that it should take place after the OAS General Assembly which was set to take place in Medellín, Colombia, June 1–3, 2008.

They agreed that the decision would be presented as a response to a plea by President Carter. There would be three public statements on June 6, in the following order: (a) a statement from The Carter Center announcing that both leaders had conveyed to President Carter their willingness to re-establish diplomatic relations at the level of chargé d’affaires “immediately and without preconditions”; (b) a statement from Colombia, confirming its decision; (c) a statement from Ecuador also confirming its decision along the same lines.

The Carter Center was in charge of contacting the Colombian government. Columbia agreed to move forward with the initiative as Ecuador had requested. After various texts suggested and revised by Foreign Minister Salvador in Ecuador and presidential adviser Jorge Mario Eastman in Colombia, they established the final content for the three press statements on June 5, 2008.19

On June 6, 2008, press statements were released at 10 a.m., noon, and 2 p.m. GMT-5. Early that morning, Dr. McCoy called the OAS secretary-general to share the good news. When she was unable to reach him, she left a voice mail and sent him the statements via e-mail. That day, Insulza also released a statement celebrating the decision and stating that the OAS would facilitate the negotiations with his personal representative and the vice foreign ministers. In effect, the OAS would implement the exchange of formal diplomatic communications that would make the decision go into effect.

New Frustrations
On June 23, 2008, the Argentinean newspaper Página 12 published an interview with President Correa that produced a negative reaction in Colombia. Although the foreign ministries had prepared diplomatic notes, Colombia informed the OAS that it had decided to “delay” the process of exchanging them. When he was informed of Colombia’s decision, President Correa responded that if that was their position, Ecuador was definitively done with the process of re-establishing relations, at least until the neighboring country had a “serious” government. On June 24 President Carter spoke with President Correa by telephone, during which the latter expressed his anger and unease with Colombia. Just days earlier, The Carter Center had managed to confirm a meeting between the BDG

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19 The statements are included as Appendix H.
and President Uribe for June 25 in Bogotá and with President Correa June 26 in Quito. During his conversation with President Carter, the Ecuadoran president confirmed his willingness to receive the BDG and conveyed his support for the Center’s continued attempts to find a way to bring the governments closer together.

Binational Dialogue Group Meets with the Presidents, June 2008

As scheduled in the plan of action agreed upon by the BDG members during their first meeting in Atlanta, a meeting took place June 25 in Bogotá between the members of the group and President Uribe. The meeting started with some tension, but it ended on a very good note. The president expressed his willingness to move forward with re-establishing diplomatic relations with Ecuador. The group drafted a press release that conveyed President Uribe’s support for its efforts, which was presented at the end of the meeting at the Palacio de Nariño. The next day the group traveled to Quito to meet with President Correa as scheduled. Unfortunately, due to a mistake by his secretary, it was not on his agenda. Only hours before, the Ecuadoran president had announced that diplomatic relations would be suspended indefinitely.

On Thursday, June 26, after a tense wait, President Correa met with the BDG, out of obligation due to the group’s presence in Quito. The group was met with a resounding no to its plea for the re-establishment of diplomatic relations. President Correa repeated his opinion of Colombia and President Uribe, and he rejected the notion of any dialogue effort between the two governments. He asked The Carter Center to desist its mediation efforts. Some of the Ecuadoran members felt, upon meeting this reaction, that their efforts—including issues other than diplomatic relations—were not supported by their president. When evaluating the situation created by the failed meeting with President Correa, the Ecuadoran group members agreed on the need to clarify the Ecuadoran government’s position on their dialogue project via a meeting between The Carter Center and their president.

Finally, also on June 26, Diez met with President Correa and gave him a detailed description of the membership and purpose of the Binational Dialogue Group. Diez emphasized the difference between the citizen-level efforts of the group and the mediation exercises of The Carter Center and the OAS. President Correa stated his support for the initiatives promoted by the Binational Dialogue Group and suggested arranging a lunch between him and its members to repair the situation. He also authorized working sessions between the Ecuadoran group members and three of his ministers.

At the same time, President Uribe sent a letter to The Carter Center to thank it for its negotiating effort and urge it to continue efforts to re-establish relations. The new foreign minister, Jaime Bermúdez, also conveyed his positive views of the Dialogue Group and his interest in meeting with the Colombian group members.

On June 27, based on the statements made by the Ecuadoran government, The Carter Center issued a press release announcing that its efforts to facilitate negotiations between the governments were over and confirming its willingness to continue working at the civil society level.20


The group’s extra-official role as a facilitator of relations between Ecuador and Colombia at the civil society level became evident through different initiatives that were promoted or collaborated on by the members of the BDG. After the fourth round of dialogue in Atlanta, the members of the BDG worked to increase the visibility of the many positive

20 Attached as Appendix I.
aspects of the relations between the two countries. These include:

• On June 12, 2008, four members of the group participated as panelists at a binational meeting called “The Future of Commercial Relations in the Current Circumstances, Ecuador–Colombia,” organized by the Colombo–Ecuadoran Chamber of Industry and Commerce, in Bogotá.

• Another four members of the group (two Ecuadorans and two Colombians) took advantage of a soccer match between the two countries’ national teams (on June 18, 2008) to promote a message of brotherhood. From the stands, they displayed a flag that read “Ecuador and Colombia a single flag.” The Colombian players came onto the field wearing traditional hats that they gave to the Ecuadoran players. The game received substantial media coverage focusing on the messages of brotherhood.

• The BDG members reserved space in the Colombian newspaper El Tiempo and in the Ecuadoran magazine Criterios for columns by journalists from the neighboring country. Unfortunately, the initiative failed due to a lack of articles.

• In a parallel fashion, some of the group members collaborated on the first binational meeting between media directors and editors. The event was organized by the Spanish American Foundation for New Journalism (Fundación Nuevo Periodismo Iberoamericano) and the Andean Foundation for Media Observation and Studies (Fundación Andina para la Observación y Estudio de Medios, Fundamedios). It was held in Quito in June 2008.
Additional members of the Binational Dialogue Group who participated in the “Colombia-Ecuador: Building Bridges” initiative, held in Pasto, Colombia, in February 2009: Nariño Governor Antonio Narvarro Wolff, Colombian Minister of Foreign Relations Jaime Bermúdez, and Victor Rico of the OAS.

- On Aug. 20, 2008, three women from the group participated as panelists in the first Colombo-Ecuadoran Meeting of Business Women, organized by the Women’s Foundation of Colombia and held in Bogotá.

- In September 2008, a binational academic forum was organized in Quito under the auspices of the OAS, FLACSO, and UNDP. Two Ecuadoran members of the group actively participated in its organization, and three members interacted as panelists or moderators.

During this period, The Carter Center also performed an evaluation of the process to determine members’ desire to continue as part of the group and their ideas for moving forward with each group to discuss the different paths it might take for continuing into the future.

These meetings yielded many conclusions and lessons. They included the importance of making a clear distinction between the role of the Binational Dialogue Group and the role of the mediation by the OAS and President Carter. The possibilities available to the group for focusing its efforts on initiatives that would contribute to a positive agenda, both through activities at the civil society level and by presenting proposals to the governments, were highlighted.

During October 2008, as part of the group’s initiative, the Ecuadoran members met with the minister of defense, Javier Ponce (Oct. 1); the minister of foreign relations, María Isabel Salvador (Oct. 16); and with the minister for the coordination of internal and external security, Gustavo Larrea (Oct. 16). During
these meetings, the Ecuadoran members listened to what the government officials had planned on binational issues, learned their perceptions regarding the role of the BDG, and shared ideas and proposals for the positive agenda. Around the same time, the Colombian group members met with Foreign Minister Jaime Bermúdez (Oct. 22).

During the different meetings between the members of the BDG and the aforementioned authorities, several relevant conclusions emerged about the group’s future course. One was that the group could play an important role in strengthening and developing the relations between Ecuador and Colombia at the level of civil society. They distinguished between the items on the positive agenda that depend on the national governments and items that could be resolved or addressed through civil society. They also stressed the importance of clearly differentiating between the citizen nature of the group and the mediation efforts put forth by other institutions, such as The Carter Center and the OAS, on the relations between the two countries.

In order to balance and reinforce the makeup of the Ecuadoran group, the members decided to incorporate three new members after October 2008: Grace Jaramillo (academic coordinator of the International Relations Program at FLACSO and columnist for El Comercio), Pedro Velasco (mayor of Tulcán), and Patricia Estupiñán (general editor of the magazine Vistazo). The selection of the new members was based on the following criteria: access to President Correa, ability to represent the border, and experience in the field of journalism.

**Fifth Meeting: Political Analysis, Quito, November 2008**

The date of the fifth binational dialogue meeting was determined by the invitation President Correa had offered during his conversation with Francisco Diez in August. The members of the group arrived in Quito Nov. 6 and 7, 2008, but at the last minute the lunch was canceled by the president’s secretary.

Despite these circumstances, the group carried on with the meeting and had an exhaustive discussion about the political situation in the countries. During the meeting they analyzed the increasingly distant possibility of restoring diplomatic relations and the impacts of the approaching electoral period in Ecuador, given that the new constitution, passed in September, ordered the convocation of general elections in April 2009.21

In November 2008, diplomatic relations between the countries continued to be broken. In October,
President Uribe declined to participate in the Extraordinary Summit of the CAN in Ecuador because of his belief that conditions were not appropriate for him to attend. The verbal sparring match between the presidents continued. The Ecuadoran government threatened to restrict the entry of Colombian citizens into the country.

The group reviewed its plan of action to continue to develop strategies and coordinate efforts in diverse areas, but with the awareness that the political situation and the evident frostiness of relations represented significant obstacles to its goals. Despite this understanding, the group worked to identify activities that could be explored between November 2008 and May 2009. For each initiative, the group designated responsible people from each country. Group members agreed to hold the last planned meeting in May 2009 in Bogotá and to evaluate the next steps based on the circumstances at that time.

At the same time, a multidisciplinary team from the UNDP’s Regional Democratic Dialogue Project began an evaluation of the binational dialogue initiative in hopes of finding lessons that could be applied to similar processes and of assessing the possibility of continuing to support the group through a new phase of work.

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Initiatives on the Common Border, February 2009

The end of 2008 came with an entrenchment of positions, aggravated by confrontational statements and measures such as the reinstatement of the requirement for Colombian citizens to present a criminal background check (pasado judicial) to enter Ecuador.

In this context, the BDG started a new initiative at the civil society level in February 2009. Under the auspices of the OAS and the UNDP, the BDG members Antonio Navarro Wolff, governor of the Colombian department of Nariño, and Socorro Ramírez, a professor at the National University of Colombia, organized a binational forum. It was called “Ecuador—Colombia: Building Bridges. Policies of Peace and Development for the Border” and was held in Pasto, the capital of Nariño, in February 2009.

Seven members of the BDG participated in the forum as presenters or moderators. It registered 507 participants; 32 percent of the participants were Ecuadorans (including ordinary citizens but also mayors, representatives of civil society, and academics). No governor or representative of the Ecuadoran national government attended, however, as the government had instructed its officials not to participate in the forum. Apart from citizens and representatives from civil society and academia from the Colombian side, the minister of foreign relations, the deputy sec-

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21 The constitution that was approved via referendum in September 2008 in Ecuador ordered the convocation of general elections that would take place on April 26, 2009.

22 The conclusions and the plan of action are included as Appendix J.
agreement with his counterpart in the Colombian city of Ipiales, just across the border. The Andean Community of Nations and the European Union supported the agreement, which represented a substantial step toward implementing the first binational border integration project for the shared management of solid waste.

**BDG Meets with President Rafael Correa, Quito, March 2009**

Finally, after discreet negotiations by The Carter Center, the members of the Binational Dialogue Group had lunch at the Palacio de Carondelet with Ecuadoran President Rafael Correa March 19, 2009. Dr. Jennifer McCoy, of The Carter Center, traveled from Atlanta for the meeting. The group members...
The Ecuadoran and Colombian governments had been unable to overcome their bilateral crisis, and tensions persisted. In a statement released at the end of January 2009, the Ecuadoran government reiterated that it would not restore diplomatic relations until Colombia had made reparations for damage caused by the March 1, 2008, attack on a FARC camp located on Ecuadoran territory and had fulfilled the five preconditions that Ecuador had presented to the Colombian government (modified from the first conditions that were transmitted in April 2008). The preconditions read as follows:

1. To disavow and end its campaign to link Ecuador and its government to the FARC;
2. To commit to maintaining an effective military presence in the border region;
3. To execute the delivery of the requested information about the incursion on March 1;
4. To present the role of the BDG and what it had worked on up to that point. They exchanged perspectives with him on the situation between the two countries, focusing in particular on the difficult situation for the border population.
5. The principal topics of conversation were the development of the border integration zone and a request to selectively waive the background check requirement for Colombians attempting to enter Ecuador. With respect to the first topic, President Correa gave his blessing to any proposal designed to improve living conditions along the border; with respect to the second, he promised to review the measure for certain areas.
6. The fundamental point was that the group felt that the Ecuadoran government had once again recognized the legitimacy of their role.

Visit by President Carter to Ecuador, Quito, April 2009

A month after the BDG’s lunch with President Correa and immediately following the Ecuadoran election on April 26, former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and former First Lady Rosalynn Carter, along with Dr. McCoy, visited Ecuador. In addition to meeting with various officials, they met with the members of the Binational Dialogue Group, including some of the Colombian members who came to Quito. Almost a year earlier, President Carter had planned a trip to four countries in the region where The Carter Center has established offices or programs. That itinerary had not included Colombia, but before embarking on the trip, President Carter placed a call to President Uribe, who confirmed his desire to attempt a new reconciliation with Ecuador.

The Ecuadoran and Colombian governments had been unable to overcome their bilateral crisis, and tensions persisted. In a statement released at the end of January 2009, the Ecuadoran government reiterated that it would not restore diplomatic relations until Colombia had made reparations for damage caused by the March 1, 2008, attack on a FARC camp located on Ecuadoran territory and had fulfilled the five preconditions that Ecuador had presented to the Colombian government (modified from the first conditions that were transmitted in April 2008). The preconditions read as follows:

1. To disavow and end its campaign to link Ecuador and its government to the FARC;
2. To commit to maintaining an effective military presence in the border region;
3. To execute the delivery of the requested information about the incursion on March 1;
4. To execute the delivery of the requested information about the computers found in Angostura; and
5. To make a contribution to the UNHCR from Colombia, in relation to the refugees.

Following the Ecuadoran government’s statement, Bogotá conveyed its interest in re-establishing relations, and it announced that it was strengthening its military presence in the border region. No further movement was made toward restoring relations, however.

During the meeting between the members of the group and President Carter, conversation focused on possible strategies for improving relations between Ecuador and Colombia in the current situation. Everyone emphasized the value of the group and urged President Carter to persevere in his efforts to reconcile the two governments. In addition, BDG members stated their intention to conclude the group’s first phase of work with the binational meeting in Bogotá, slated to take place in the next few weeks, and to assess the possibility of continuing work into a second phase.

President Carter met with Fander Falconí, the new Ecuadoran foreign minister, who was emphatic in saying that any move with Colombia should be decided by President Correa. He then asked the secretary of President Correa to set aside 15 minutes of the meeting already planned with President Carter and his staff, so that Carter and Correa could speak privately. In that time, Correa started the conversation about Colombia and accepted Carter’s offer to invite both foreign ministers to meet with him informally in Atlanta. President Carter subsequently called President Uribe, who also accepted the invitation to send his foreign minister to Atlanta.

**Sixth Meeting: Review of Group’s Progress, Bogotá, May 2009**

The sixth binational dialogue meeting took place in Bogotá May 12–13, 2009. Its principal objective was to analyze the progress of the group from its inception by identifying lessons, systematizing the processes,
The Democratic Dialogue Regional Project team from the UNDP presented the preliminary results of the participant evaluation process that it had started in November 2008. These preliminary conclusions stood out:

- Wide agreement on the belief that the events of March 1, 2008, changed — if not its objectives — at least the “strategy” of the BDG.
- The lesson of the value of seeing things through the eyes of others, which saved the progress that the BDG made.
- Consensus that the group helped mitigate the escalation of crisis at crucial moments and that the group’s previous history helped them to confront the challenge.
- Although diplomatic relations were not restored, the group’s negotiation efforts were influential at the government level. It emphasized to the Colombian authorities that the back-and-forth exchange of press statements increased tensions. It emphasized with the Ecuadoran government the negative effect that the break in diplomatic relations had on border development and the difficulties created by the requirement of a notarized criminal background check.
- The creation of academic spaces where involved actors convened to discuss different issues that affect binational relations.
- The “role of preventing escalation” that a group like this can play, since their relationships allow its members to jump into action at crucial junctures.
- The importance of differentiating between government relations and relationships between peoples.

In keeping with the decision of the BDG to continue its efforts, various initiatives that would have influence at different levels, as well as achieve wider public exposure, were explored. A press statement was also developed.24

**Binational Dialogue Group, June—October 2009**

The formal existence of the BDG, with the support of The Carter Center, came to an end during the final dialogue round in May 2009. Thereafter, the efforts of members in pursuit of opportunities for improving relations between their two countries were dependent on individual and collective initiative.

With the support of some of the Ecuadoran and Colombian members and under the leadership of Antonio Navarro Wolff as the governor of Nariño, on Sept. 8, 2009, a meeting was held in the city of Pasto, in southern Colombia, between the governor and the new mayor of Túcán. At that meeting — which was attended by delegates from The Carter Center — both authorities agreed to arrange a meeting for local authorities from Nariño and Carchi, which came to fruition two weeks later in Rumichaca, Ecuador.

At the same time, Colombian journalist Claudia Gurisatti and BDG member Manuel Chiriboga traveled to Atlanta to complete the binational documentary on Ecuador and Colombia, an activity the BDG had planned, and to conduct an interview with President Carter. BDG member Ricardo Ávila was also part of the initiative, and he attended in order to complete his own interview with President Carter.
which was published in the newspaper El Tiempo. During the interviews, issues such as the relations between Ecuador and Colombia, President Carter's perspectives on relations between the United States and the Andean region in regard to the new administration of President Barack Obama, and the region's geopolitical dynamics were addressed.

The binational documentary was broadcast on the Colombian television program “La Noche” in late September 2009. A few days later, excerpts were broadcast in a special program on Ecuador–Colombia relations on the Ecuadoran news network Ecuavisa. The documentary’s goal was to discuss the differences and similarities between the views of the Ecuadoran and Colombian peoples on issues that affect the relationship between their countries. It also related the story of the Binational Dialogue Group and how that experience had influenced the perceptions of the members regarding common problems and interests. Finally, it included the opinion and advice of President Carter to the presidents of Colombia and Ecuador, encouraging these two neighbors to re-establish diplomatic relations.

After the group’s final round of dialogue, the Carter Center staff collected the testimonies of each of the members about the experience they had shared since November 2007. Their experiences and lessons are presented in the next section.

**Carter Center Conducts Third Mediation, April–August 2009**

After the meeting between President Carter and President Correa on April 28, the governments agreed that both of the foreign ministers would work at an informal, discreet meeting in Atlanta to explore options for reconciliation May 21–22, 2009. A few days before the meeting, The Carter Center sent both foreign ministers a document called the “Framework for Work” in order to establish a safe common ground and explain how President Carter’s facilitation would work.

The meeting in Atlanta began with a dinner with the Ecuadoran delegation and was followed by a breakfast with just the Colombian delegation. Afterward, the remainder of the morning was spent in a joint session. Around midday, President Carter asked for a recess so that he could draft a proposal for an agreement. Both delegations reviewed the proposal over lunch, and once they returned to the meeting room, they reached an agreement on the text. The foreign ministers exchanged private phone numbers. They established that the agreement could be considered only after receiving the approval of President Correa and President Uribe. Over the subsequent days, several phone calls were made, during which they partially modified the text, until they finally reached a consensus on June 2, which included re-establishing relations at the level of chargé d’affaires.

At the request of the two foreign ministers, on June 25 The Carter Center presented a “road map” for moving forward in implementing the agreement that had been reached in the previous days, which included the following steps: (a) in the coming weeks, until the details of a comprehensive agreement could be ironed out, both the presidents and other high-ranking government officials would refrain from making negative comments about the other country and its policies; (b) the establishment of different mechanisms for addressing specific issues such as security and criminal activity, border development, and sensitive information; (c) the preparation of documents for the exchange of diplomatic correspondence and designation of diplomatic representatives; and (d) arranging for a meeting of the foreign ministers during the first week of August. (e) The release of a joint press statement that would describe the agreements that had been reached.

These steps were taken in the geopolitical context characterized by Ecuador joining ALBA and the commencement of negotiations between Colombia and the United States for a new military cooperation agreement that would allow the United States to continue to use Colombia’s military bases as part of the effort to combat drug trafficking. The latter developments had increased the tension among Bogotá, Caracas, and Quito.
New Complications
The third mediation exercise fell victim to new complications that increased mistrust between Bogotá and Quito. The Carter Center had presented the road map to both parties; at the same time, however, a new cycle of conflict began between the two governments. The attorney general of Ecuador announced that the former Colombian minister of defense, Juan Manuel Santos, would face criminal charges in the province of Sucumbíos. In Colombia, a group of attorneys (independent from the government) submitted to the attorney general charges against the Ecuadoran president and the former minister of security, Gustavo Larrea, which accused him of maintaining ties to the FARC. At the same time the media was broadcasting a video of a leader of the FARC, Jorge Briceño, alias Mono Jojoy, in which he claimed that the guerrilla group had made financial contributions to the electoral campaign of the Ecuadoran president.

The increase in tension gave way to a series of unfriendly gestures between the two governments, which brought trade relations into the diplomatic conflict. In July 2009 the Ecuadoran government imposed economic restrictions against the importation of various Colombian products. The Colombian government filed a complaint with the CAN and informally suspended the transportation of Ecuadoran goods across the common border.

On July 29, 2009, just days before the start of Rafael Correa’s new presidential term, Gustavo Jalkh, the minister of government, submitted excerpts from the presumed diary of “Raúl Reyes” to the attorney general, in which the FARC second in command claimed to have been betrayed by officials in President Correa’s administration who were involved in linked to drug trafficking.

A New Effort to Finish the Agreement
Falconí’s gesture was interpreted as a sign that bilateral relations between the countries were taking a turn for the better. During a meeting of the Andean Community of Nations in the last week of July, Foreign Ministers Falconí and Bermúdez privately resumed talks. The Carter Center had drafted a new version of the road map proposed in June so that it could serve as a basis for direct talks between the ministers. Among other points, the draft called for the ratification of the validity of the points in the agreement reached on June 2, 2009, and the formation of binational working commissions to finalize details of agreements relating to previously proposed issues.

For its part, Colombia had sent a positive message to Ecuador. A group of 11 Ecuadoran soldiers, in civilian clothing, were captured by military authorities on Colombian territory in the border department of Putumayo. The soldiers were returned to the Ecuadoran military authorities, as specified by the bilateral Security Agreement (Cartilla de Seguridad). Meanwhile, the CAN had issued a resolution that reduced many of Ecuador’s economic restrictions on Colombian products.

25 On June 29, 2009, a judge in Sucumbíos ordered the arrest of the former Colombian minister of defense, Juan Manuel Santos, on accusations of coordinating and ordering the March 1, 2008, attack on the FARC base camp in Angostura, where an Ecuadorian citizen was killed.

26 Once again, the allegations involved officials in the Ecuadorian government, particularly former Coordinating Minister of Security Gustavo Larrea.

27 As the Constituent Assembly had ordered, in April 2009 general elections were held. President Rafael Correa was re-elected, this time to begin his first mandate under the new constitutional regime.

28 The Colombian authorities had submitted a copy of the manuscript to the Ecuadoran government. The act was perceived as an opportunity for the Ecuadoran government to distance itself from the officials under suspicion for their ties to the Colombian guerrillas.

29 Attached as Appendix L.

30 Security and Control of Criminal Activity, Border Development and Refugees, Other Pending Issues.
On Aug. 10, the day President Correa was sworn in to office, Francisco Diez arrived in Quito before traveling on to Bogotá. During his stay in the Ecuadoran capital, Diez dedicated a great deal of time to exploring the status of the previous mediation efforts and to pushing for negotiations between the two governments. He also met with the Ecuadoran members of the BDG to gauge their perceptions of the political situation.

Also on Aug. 10, the meeting of the UNASUR presidents took place in Quito without President Uribe. The principal topic was the negotiations between Colombia and the United States over the use of Colombia’s military bases by the United States military. President Correa, along with Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez, was vocally critical of these negotiations. The officials present decided to discuss the issue further and arranged another meeting—one they hoped the Colombian president would attend—set to take place in late August in Bariloche, Argentina.

Despite the events surrounding the UNASUR meeting, the officials from both governments mentioned to Diez the willingness of President Correa and President Uribe to move forward with the re-establishment of relations between the two nations, as well as their interest in working with their counterparts. In Quito, Diez met with Minister of Defense Javier Ponce, Minister of Security Miguel Carvajal, and with Marco Albuja, an adviser to Foreign Minister Falconí. Once in Bogotá, Diez met with President Uribe’s adviser Jorge Mario Eastman; the new Colombian minister of defense, Gabriel Silva; and Foreign

President Uribe announced his government’s willingness to initiate dialogue to re-establish relations between his country and Ecuador and, once again, issued a public apology to the Ecuadorian government for the events in Angostura. The Ecuadorian response came the next day. During his weekly radio address on Aug. 15, President Correa accepted the apology of the Colombian president and confirmed that he was ready for talks to restore diplomatic relations.

Minister Bermúdez on Aug. 14. The presence of Diez served as a channel of communication between authorities in both governments that were attempting to translate their good intentions into actions.

On Aug. 14, during the closing ceremony of the General Assembly of the National Business Association of Colombia, President Uribe announced his government’s willingness to initiate dialogue to re-establish relations between his country and Ecuador and, once again, issued a public apology to the Ecuadorian government for the events in Angostura. The Ecuadorian response came the next day. During his weekly radio address on Aug. 15, President Correa accepted the apology of the Colombian president and confirmed that he was ready for talks to restore diplomatic relations, on the condition that Colombia fulfill the following commitments: delivery of video footage of the Angostura bombing, delivery of the hard drives of the computers found in the FARC base camp, and cessation of its attempts to link the Ecuadoran government with the FARC.

One week later, Bermúdez and Falconí held another meeting as part of the XIV Extraordinary Meeting of the CAN’s Andean Council of Ministers of Foreign Relations in Lima, as the extraordinary UNASUR meeting drew near. Formal rapprochement between the foreign ministers became more evident after the meeting of the presidents at UNASUR, in Bariloche, Argentina. Despite the tense nature of a meeting whose focal point was Colombian security policy, the foreign ministers of Colombia and Ecuador
announced their willingness to begin dialogue over the next few days. The proposed setting was the General Assembly of the United Nations, which both ministers planned to attend, in New York in September 2009.

The Colombian government sent another positive signal: President Uribe asked Antonio Navarro Wolff, governor of Nariño and member of the BDG, to serve as a mediator between Colombia and the Ecuadoran government to re-establish relations between Quito and Bogotá. Although he was unable to serve as mediator, at every opportunity Navarro Wolff used political, social, and border platforms to maintain a channel of communication between the two governments, in pursuit of a relationship of brotherhood and collaboration between the nations.

Final Road to Full Relations

The first formal meeting between Ministers Falconí and Bermúdez took place in New York during the 64th Ordinary General Assembly of the United Nations, in the third week of September 2009. In that time, the foreign ministers released a joint statement in which they acknowledged the beginning of a process of direct dialogue aimed at achieving a normalization of diplomatic relations between the countries; concrete commitments for the next steps, the recognition of some conditions proposed by both sides, and a formal petition for the involvement of The Carter Center and the OAS as facilitators to address the sensitive issues of contention between Ecuador and Colombia. The statement’s different points captured the spirit of the agreement that had been facilitated by President Carter in June 2009.

On Oct. 8, 2009, the second formal meeting between the foreign ministers and delegations of officials from both governments took place in the border city of Ipiales, Colombia. The meeting’s objective was to move forward the process of re-establishing diplomatic relations. Also in attendance were the OAS secretary-general, José Miguel Insulza, and a representative from The Carter Center, Dr. Jennifer McCoy. They discussed the steps forward and the formation of three commissions to address pertinent binational issues:

1. Commission on Security and Control of Criminal Activity
2. Commission on Border Development
3. Commission on Sensitive Issues

The foreign ministers requested that The Carter Center and the OAS facilitate the third commission. It would address such issues as the judicial process against former Defense Minister Juan Manuel Santos, the details relating to the information about the March 1, 2008, attack on the FARC base camp in Angostura, and the content of the hard drives of the personal computers found there. A time line was also established for future meetings of the commissions.

The first two commissions were set to meet on different dates during the rest of October; for the dialogue on the sensitive issues, another foreign-minister-level meeting was planned for Nov. 3.

To the dismay of the foreign ministers and other authorities, the next steps were briefly interrupted by a resurgent tension between the two countries. The meetings of the first two commissions were postponed following an extradition request by an Ecuadoran judge in the border town of Sucumbíos for former Colombian Defense Minister Juan Manuel Santos and other military officials, including the commander of the Colombian military forces, General Freddy Padilla, along with other lower-ranking officials.

The commitment of the two governments to reestablish relations was made evident by the efforts of Foreign Ministers Falconí and Bermúdez to avoid postponing the dialogue scheduled for Nov. 3, how-

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31 Included as Appendix M.
32 The first meeting of the Commission on Security and Control of Criminal Activity was scheduled to take place in the Ecuadorian city of Ibarra, in northern Ecuador. During that time, plans were also made to reactivate the Binational Border Commission (Combifron). Combifron is a mechanism for studying security issues that comprises security authorities from Ecuador and Colombia. The Colombian authorities had indicated that there were not sufficient guarantees to allow their military delegates to travel to Ecuador; given the extradition requests.
ever. In fact, the Nov. 3 dialogue was when they addressed the sensitive issues that allowed them to continue on their course.

During the Nov. 3 meeting in Cotacachi, facilitated by Insulza and McCoy, the two foreign ministers announced their plans to appoint the chargés d'affaires by Nov. 15 and to re-establish Combifron (the Binational Border Commission). Both of these commitments were fulfilled. Andrés Terán of Ecuador and Ricardo Montenegro of Colombia assumed their posts in Bogotá and Quito, respectively, which fulfilled the commitment to re-establish relations at the level of chargé d'affaires, as had originally been agreed upon in June 2008 and reiterated during the meeting in May 2009 in Atlanta.

The electoral period in Colombia in 2010 delayed the process of resolving the issues in the Sensitive Issues Commission until after the inauguration of Juan Manuel Santos in August 2010. Leading up to the inauguration, members of the BDG facilitated meetings of Vice President-elect Garzón and the designated foreign minister, Maria Angela Holguín, in Ecuador. On Aug. 7, President Correa attended the inauguration, and President Santos delivered some of the requested information to him personally. Subsequent meetings of the two foreign ministers resolved the remaining outstanding issues and on Nov. 26, 2010, the two countries announced the full re-establishment of relations.
The Binational Dialogue Group in the Words of its Members*

Adrián Bonilla  
An Enriching Experience

My experience with the Binational Dialogue Group was enriching for a variety of reasons. All of us—and me in particular—were able to better understand the circumstances that can produce real dialogue and to have direct contact with people who had vastly different and deeply rooted beliefs about the differences between Ecuador and Colombia. It allowed us to learn about the perspectives of different Colombian sectors on what was happening in Ecuador and to establish that in Colombia very little was known about Ecuador and its foreign policy. It also provided us with a better idea of how decisions are made in Ecuador and Colombia. This production of firsthand knowledge was one of the most satisfying aspects. The experience left me with a wealth of knowledge.

I believe that the group was inhibited by its inability—as with all of the institutions and people interested in improving relations between Ecuador and Colombia—to influence the Ecuadorian government in particular, which was the government with which we, the Ecuadorians, had to work. The group’s ability to publicize various issues was significant, however. I don’t believe that the group was able to accomplish very much in light of the government’s entrenched position, which proved rigid and inflexible despite all manner of gestures from within the country, outside the country, civil society, etc. I believe that the group did what it had to do but that its success was prevented by the position of the Ecuadorian government, which was perfectly clear.

In the Binational Dialogue Group, we took the initiative to do whatever we could to help both countries to learn more about Ecuador and Colombia and to spread this information to the public. As a member of the group, and in my field, I became involved in a multitude of public initiatives that took place in Ecuador and Colombia to bring the countries closer together. Given that FLACSO was the academic institution represented in the group from the Ecuadorian side, I participated in various academic and public events of every kind. For example, in September 2008, FLACSO organized a binational academic forum in conjunction with the OAS and the UNDP. Although the Binational Dialogue Group itself did not organize the event, the group’s vision guided the exercise. In addition, various members of the group contributed to the forum’s organization and participated in it as well.

Members of the group contributed to the binational dialogue from their different fields. Personally, I believe I contributed a specialized, systematic, and analytical perspective on foreign policy. I also believe I contributed credible information. One of the most important results of the group’s efforts was placing important issues for relations between Ecuador and Colombia onto the public agenda. The Binational Dialogue Group also produced a lot of information that could be systematized for use in future negotiating exercises within Ecuador and especially outside the country.

* Through May 2009.
I do not believe anything could have been improved about this exercise, except perhaps our initial analysis, as members of the group, that we shared at the beginning and our assumption that a resolution between Ecuador and Colombia was possible. When the group was formed, the events of March 1, 2008, had yet to take place, along with the break in diplomatic relations between the two countries. We all assumed, and it was not an error of the groups, that a rapprochement was possible between both countries. Ultimately, rapprochement was not possible despite the interventions of the group, representatives of The Carter Center, gestures by the OAS, and resolutions by the Río Group. The failure went much deeper than the capacities of the Binational Dialogue Group, if this can be called a “failure.” It seems to me that within the Ecuadorian government, the position adopted was to be impermeable to the influence of anyone who would change its decision.

Ecuador’s policies toward Colombia are entrenched in a series of ideological principles that are difficult to move beyond. I believe they are based on values, principles, beliefs, and assumptions. To accurately analyze Ecuador’s position, you would need to use a model that takes this into account. Ecuador’s foreign policy toward Colombia cannot be explained using the rational models from political science. I believe you have to apply a perspective that emphasizes the influence of ideology on beliefs rather than a simply emotional perspective.

Thinking about the future, I believe it would be a waste to dissolve the Binational Dialogue Group, as it has accumulated so much experience and knowledge that can be systematized. There are also many activities that have already been organized. There is a network in place. The group will probably need to be renewed and extended to include more of society. Maybe the group will abandon the effort to influence government policies as one of its central objectives. It seems to me that the group should continue to exist and in some way pursue the initiatives that The Carter Center can sponsor. The group should be maintained as a forum for reconciliation and mediation. That is its nature.

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Antonio Navarro Wolff

The Weight of the Colombian Conflict

My experience as a member of the Binational Dialogue Group allowed me to better understand the Ecuadorian people. It was deeply rewarding to have the chance to meet such a diverse group of Ecuadorians. The Colombians and Ecuadorians are very close and, at the same time, very distant. I live along the border, and I know more about Ecuador than your average Colombian. Even though I went in with a general idea, however, I learned more about how Colombia was seen in Ecuador. This exchange with the other members of the group really enriched me. It was a stimulating and interesting experience. It was highly valuable to meet other people in the flesh and establish direct, personal relationships with other members of the Binational Dialogue Group. It was truly valuable, for example, to have a chance to meet a former foreign minister of Ecuador, share experiences with him, and understand him. This type of exchange was extremely important for both sides and for me personally.

From my perspective, the overall experience was very good. The only element missing at the beginning was the lack of representation of a regional government official from the Ecuadorian side of the border. The inclusion of the mayor of Tulcán, Pedro Velasco, was a positive step in this sense, but it would have been better to include him from the beginning. It is also a bit sad that we were not able to realize our hope of seeing diplomatic relations restored between the two countries.

Of everything we did, what I enjoyed most was welcoming so many Ecuadorians in Pasto and encountering such warm affection for Colombia on the other side of the border. At the same time, Nariño’s affection for Ecuador is still there as well. If relations between the two countries could have been resumed along the border, relations never would have been broken off in the first place. I do have to recognize one thing: The Colombian people and government have been too careless in their handling of Ecuador’s opinion of Colombia. Ten years ago, Colombians were respected—I would even say admired—in Ecuador, whereas today they are viewed with some discomfort. There is a certain element of resentment by the Ecuadorian public because the Colombian people and government have treated the Ecuadorian people with disdain and a lack of concern. Now, we are all suffering the consequences.

I contributed to the group a vision of binational relations along the border. This was my main contribution. I also contributed a more precise vision of what they think in Ecuador about Colombia and about what happens in Colombia. I also believe that it was useful from the other perspective to show the members of the group how Ecuador is seen by Colombia. Another contribution I made was an analysis of the Colombian armed conflict. I believe it is important for the Ecuadorian people to understand this conflict. This is an undertaking that is just beginning. I believe it is utterly crucial for the people who are capable of influencing public opinion in Ecuador to understand the history and the logic of the Colombian armed conflict because that conflict is affecting bilateral relations in a very significant way. Before you can cure a patient, you have to properly diagnose him. I believe that Ecuador has misdiagnosed the Colombian armed conflict. At times I feel that even in Colombia we don’t understand the conflict we are living through. It is not surprising that our neighbors would have trouble understanding it. I believe if there is anything left to do, correcting that lapse would be it. I have personal and direct experience of the Colombian armed conflict. I understand it very well. Sharing this knowledge with the Ecuadorian public is worth the effort to continue. I also played an influential role in two initiatives, including the binational forum in Pasto that took place in February.

One of the results of the binational forum in Pasto was promoting relations between civil society organizations along both sides of the border. It allowed initiatives that were already under way to continue developing, such as relations among indigenous
people on both sides of the border, among nongovernmental organizations, among universities, etc. The University of Nariño took on a commitment to open a campus in Ecuador. It is not good that they know more about Ecuador at the National University of Colombia in Bogotá than at the University of Nariño. The universities in Ecuador should make the same commitment. This forum also provided continuity for the relationships between local governments both in the Sierra region and along the coast. There are projects that should continue to develop, such as creating a binational fishing school. There are also projects being coordinated between the mayors of Ipiales and Tuclán. Many different initiatives that are in the interests of the border populations should be extended.

Another contribution of mine could have been my direct relationship with President Correa. The last time that I saw him was at a public event in the city of Tuclán. There we discussed our personal relationship and the political similarities we have between what I believe and what he believes as the president of Ecuador in general terms. We also reiterated the differences we have over how the situation with Colombia should be managed.

Something very important came out of this event in Tuclán. There was a major parade in the streets, led by President Correa. The people of Tuclán showed a great deal of solidarity with Colombia. There were tons of banners that said “Ecuador and Colombia united always.” There is a strong friendship between both peoples along the border.

President Correa has always said that his problem is not with the Colombian people but with the current government of Colombia, but it was significant for him to have a direct personal experience with the affection for Colombia along Ecuador’s border and with Colombia’s cultural influence. When the different schools started to march—the president watched five or six schools march before he had to go—all of the students in the parade danced and presented different things associated with Colombian music and folklore. The influence of Colombian music is significant; schools and colleges in Ecuador use it for their musical presentations and dances. This episode made me believe that the people of the border have the best binational relations.

Each member of the group tried to make his or her own contribution. As with anything, one should do what one can, what is at hand. For example, I met with the Nariño Chamber of Commerce, the National Federation of Merchants, universities, labor unions, and small-business owners. I proposed that they participate in a campaign to reinforce the brotherhood between the Colombian and Ecuadorian people. We had some stickers made that are still visible in some window displays in Pasto that said “Ecuador–Colombia: A Single Identity.” This is in part a reflection of what people feel and also the reality of the situation at the border. At certain times people cross the border to make purchases (such as when the exchange rate favors it), and at other times it is the opposite. For many years it was cheaper to buy things in Ecuador; now it’s cheaper for Ecuadorians to buy things in Colombia. Now, as I understand it, the business owners in Colombia have to welcome their Ecuadorian customers, and this sticker serves as a simple but direct sign of welcome to the Ecuadorian people.

Right now I am working with major vendors in the Nariño zone to invite journalists from Ecuador to visit the Andean part of Nariño and observe how safe the situation is. While the situation in some Colombian zones is dangerous, in others it simply isn’t. Thus, we would like to see Ecuadorian journalists who shape public opinion spread the news that traveling to Pasto or Ipiales by land is not dangerous. Groups of journalists have already traveled to Nariño on numerous past occasions. Along these lines, I believe there is a strong counterpart as well. The people in the unions of Ibarra spoke with me and complained that they see fewer tourists now from Colombia coming to Ibarra. Why is that? The chief explanation is the complex-
ity of the requirements for entry imposed by the Ecuadorian government. The Colombian tourists who used to visit Ecuador during December, Easter week, or July and August are no longer coming. They prefer to travel to other destinations. The notarized criminal background check requirements only complicate the process further. Tourists with smaller means are not especially concerned with the exchange rate on the dollar. Your average, everyday person is not going to put himself or herself through all of those hoops. Ultimately the result is fewer Colombians traveling to Ecuador. For people in the northern part of Ecuador, as well as for us, it would be better if these restrictions were lifted.

Thinking about the future, I believe that all processes must have a beginning and an end. We need to find causes in common to take up. Even though the Binational Dialogue Group will not continue formally, I believe that relationships have been established between its members that will last throughout the years. Finally, I would like to thank President Carter for continuing to work with such vitality. The best chance there has been all year for re-establishing diplomatic relations between Colombia and Ecuador was a direct result of the ideas and personal action of President Carter. I hope that he will not lose his constructive, positive attitude toward these issues. While the work accomplished by the Organization of American States has been important, the role of President Carter and his relationships with President Uribe and President Correa were crucial in advancing toward and coming so close to the re-establishment of diplomatic relations. This demonstrates the strong focus on relationships between presidents that we have in Latin America. These relationships are too presidential for my taste, but this is the reality, and the truth is that personal relationships between presidents play a very important role.

Antonio Navarro Wolff is governor of the department of Nariño, Colombia. He was a candidate for the Polo Democrático Alternativo in the presidential elections of May 2006. He was president of the national constituent assembly that wrote the political constitution in 1991. He has served as the minister of health (1990), candidate for the presidency (1994), mayor of Pasto (1995–1997), congressional representative (1998–2002), and senator (2002–2006) for Bogotá.
The Carter Center

Binational Dialogue: Ecuador—Colombia

Augusto Ramírez Ocampo

From Skepticism to Conviction

Participating in a group that was so diverse and also so accomplished in different fields was a very interesting exercise. It was a real pleasure to get to know both the Ecuadorian members as well as the Colombian members whom I had known less intimately in the past. I had a chance to learn about all of their abilities and potential.

The first meeting of the Binational Dialogue Group in Atlanta was very important. There was an adjustment period for the whole process, and, above all, it produced a needed catharsis for all of the participants present, as each of us quickly expressed our differences and disagreements, especially in relation to the official policies as seen from each country’s point of view. There were positions that were totally opposed to each other and positions that were shared unanimously by all the members from each country. This culminated in a difficult climax, one that wasn’t always pleasant, but it was necessary for us to truly experience catharsis. It allowed us to express ourselves sincerely and come to understand one another as well as to realize that the group absolutely had to reach some agreements before being able to function.

What occurred in the next binational dialogue meeting in Quito was entirely different. We had established an environment suited to understanding and tranquility. In a way, this environment set us on a course of working together with the goal of reaching agreements and making contributions from each of our countries to promote greater understanding of one another. This was before the tragic events of March 1, 2008, had occurred, so we were able to take on concrete issues, such as the situation of refugees and displaced persons. We also met with two key Ecuadorian ministers, the Ecuadorian foreign minister and the coordinating minister for internal and external security, which gave us a fuller understanding of the thinking of the Ecuadorian government on some of these controversial issues.

These events helped us resist the explosive fallout from the bombardment of the Raúl Reyes camp. It was very difficult to listen to the official statement by the president of Ecuador, read by the foreign minister, harshly announcing the formal termination of diplomatic relations with Colombia and paralyzing the few positive steps we had achieved up to that point. Despite this episode, the Ecuadorian members of the Binational Dialogue Group, with admirable courage, agreed to attend the next binational meeting that was scheduled to occur in Bogotá. Before this meeting, three Colombian members of the group, Antonio Navarro Wolff, Socorro Ramírez and I, had traveled to Quito to assess the impact of the events of March 1 on the process we had been attempting. With the Bogotá meeting scheduled for March or April, we met with the other Colombian members of the group in Bogotá to evaluate the consequences of the events of March 1 for the work we had committed to by accepting the invitation of former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and his organization. We reached the conclusion that it was essential to sound out the situation before organizing a new binational meeting, which could turn out to be extremely difficult if we did not first establish that there was a desire to reunite in another meeting. During this meeting, the group asked that Socorro Ramírez, Antonio Navarro Wolff, and I make a quick trip to Quito in order to find out the positions of the Ecuadorian members and explain our perceptions of the situation as Colombians.

Once we arrived in Quito, we met with the Ecuadorian members of the Binational Dialogue Group. We also had informal meetings with the foreign minister and an official from the Ecuadorian government who had been a member of the group at one time. Unfortunately, we arrived at the worst possible time because, shortly afterward, an urgent note arrived from the Colombian president’s office with a resoundingly strong response from President Uribe to the public declarations made by President Correa in a press conference in Mexico, and that led to a public verbal incident between the Colombian ambassador in Mexico and President Correa. This episode only intensified the mood. Even so, with various
Ecuadorian members of the group accompanying us to these meetings, we moved past the situation, and the trip turned out to be very useful.

Just after our trip to Quito, President Uribe himself called me from Cartagena, where he had just finished speaking with the Colombian ambassador to Mexico, who had just given him a rundown of what had happened with President Correa. It struck me as a comedy of errors. First of all, the foreign minister had not considered it pertinent—although certainly with some reason—to instruct our ambassadors with respect to the Colombian government’s decision not to respond in any way to any public statements or private insults that could be directed against the Colombian government. Let’s remember that one of the first decisions that the Ecuadorian and Colombian members agreed upon was to attempt to persuade our presidents to stop making negative public statements about one another. From that point on, we were working to ensure that all public statements be made by the foreign ministries. That effort suffered from President Correa’s statements and the immediate reaction of the Colombian ambassador, who was taken by surprise by the Ecuadorian press and obviously acted on instinct. A little blame also fell on the general instructions offered to the Colombian diplomatic corps in the exterior to defend Colombian dignity. I believe that these explanations and my account of the trip that I had completed a day earlier to President Uribe proved very useful. The trip kept me fully informed of all of the up-to-the-minute developments, and it allowed me to present President Uribe with a storyline about what had happened and, at the same time, to make some suggestions to him, after he opened the door for me to offer them.

I believe it was thanks to all of that effort that the Bogotá meeting followed the same course as the one in Quito. This time there were conciliatory gestures between the Colombian foreign minister and an adviser of the president of Ecuador. These meetings allowed us to go further in depth on extremely sensitive issues such as the Colombian armed conflict and the impressions of the Ecuadorian members on the situation. I believe that this discussion allowed the exercise to continue. It was very difficult to anticipate all of these events. In a way, it was a miracle that the meetings in Atlanta and Quito took place before March 1, 2008. Thanks to the path laid out in these meetings, we were able to overcome the serious incident of March 1, which demonstrated that we had already achieved, at least for the moment, a substantial level of trust between the members from each country.

I believe that the policy we adopted toward the press for the meetings of the Binational Dialogue Group was very important, especially when it came to public statements. The press routinely asked various group members about international issues, and so, as members of the group, we were in an advantageous position to express our opinions, attempt to desensationalize public opinion, and raise awareness among journalists and editors. This effort was an important one on both sides thanks to the journalists who formed a part of the Binational Dialogue Group—who also acted with exceptional loyalty, given that none of them leaked a single story—and the other members, who continued to work toward the long-term project of encouraging calmness and explaining events thoroughly in the hope of preventing their further escalation.

My years of experience with international issues—in particular, my work as an international official with the United Nations and the Organization of American States—helped me to understand the issues we discussed in the Binational Dialogue Group. In particular, through the roles I played in Haiti and later in El Salvador as a special representative of...
the secretary-general of the United Nations and as the chief of the Observation Mission of the United Nations in El Salvador, where negotiations between the Salvadoran government and guerrillas were practically my principal task, I learned a great deal about the need to negotiate and about various negotiation techniques. This experience served me well in contributing to the group.

At the same time, the fact that I had been a foreign minister helped me, given that in the Colombian Foreign Ministry there is a great deal of respect for individuals who have served as foreign minister. Each foreign minister who takes on the position periodically consults with the group of former foreign ministers. This allowed the Binational Dialogue Group to have direct access to the decisions of the Colombian government. I wasn’t the only one with direct access to the Colombian government, however. Other members, for example, had very comfortable relationships with the president of the republic. I had personal relationships with some executive officials who had access to the issue of relations between Colombia and Ecuador, including some former colleagues. These types of relationships allowed me to contribute at particularly delicate moments, because I had direct access to the Colombian foreign policymakers. This access was especially helpful for a mission as difficult and intelligently designed as the one undertaken by the Carter Center’s representative in Latin America, Francisco Diez, in his pendulum diplomacy between Quito–Bogotá and Bogotá–Quito, which allowed us to design the so-called baby steps with the goal of reducing the harshest effects of the break in diplomatic relations little by little. It helped to make things a little easier and allowed Diez to play a transcendental role.

My previous experiences with dialogue processes taught me how to deal with positive and negative episodes. As a result, even in moments of extreme tension, I could apply some of my lessons from experience, such as the need to always treat the other party with respect and to accept the fact that neither party has a monopoly on the truth. If you come to a negotiating table, you have to come ready to give on some things and to understand the other party’s reasons. This interesting experience of more than a year with the Binational Dialogue Group allowed me to confirm these lessons.

It also strikes me that we were learning as we went along because, initially, we were unclear and our goals were not specific. A fundamental issue that came up during the course of the exercise was the formal break in diplomatic relations and the need to restore them, which became a part of the Binational Dialogue Group’s agenda and became one of its most important purposes. All of the members of the group felt that the disruption of diplomatic relations was a problem and that their re-establishment should continue to be an important objective for the group; that is, we should strive to persuade both governments, help them, and incentivize them to re-establish diplomatic relations.

I remained deeply committed to the discussion in the last binational dialogue meeting in Bogotá. There was disagreement over whether the Binational Dialogue Group should end or continue with less intensity and, if so, what its goals should be. I believe this discussion was very useful, and it allowed us to begin what we have termed “the second phase of the process” in better conditions than we started the first one, because this time we have clearly defined our objectives. I now agree completely with each of the points that we agreed upon at the meeting, that is, the need for the Binational Dialogue Group to continue working on the following issues:

- First, exert influence at the government level (in particular, to encourage the re-establishment of diplomatic relations);
- Second, continue working to influence public opinion to improve relations between the two countries;
- Third, continue pursuing actions that have already been planned (for example, the second binational meeting for media directors and editors that was planned for Cali or the binational entrepreneur meeting) and continue with the admirable efforts of the academic members of the Binational Dialogue Group;
Fourth, stimulate the interest of the international community in the so-called Border Integration Zone (in Ecuador, we have made a lot of progress thanks to the support of the UNDP and Ecuador’s government) and promote the idea of calling together in New York or Washington the United Nations, the Inter-American Development Bank, the CAF, and the OAS to propose a major project to be mirrored on both sides of the border. This project could be implemented without diplomatic relations being established—although the ideal scenario is to re-establish them—to avoid wasting time and to be able to develop the Border Integration Zone independently of fractured political relationships. I believe this project is possible, especially in a situation like the current one, when the interest of the international community should be at its height. It is important to remove this issue from the fray of confrontation and politics and to promote development in the three border zones that we have throughout the 650 kilometers of the border. Doing so would also allow us to support the process of moving past the Colombian bombing of Angostura. The other thing is to take advantage of some of the recently created forums in Latin America to ensure that the region remains involved in the process, as it was in the OAS meeting and the meeting in the Dominican Republic, which led to a solution of a very serious situation. Thanks to the Río Group meeting in the Dominican Republic, diplomatic relations were re-established between Colombia and Venezuela, and between Colombia and Nicaragua. These Latin American mechanisms are very important for the situation in which we find ourselves.

Now the Binational Dialogue Group should decide who will be invited to the second phase of the process, in pursuit of the determined objectives. It strikes me that everyone involved is in the best position to continue or withdraw, based on their immediate needs. I also suppose that individuals who do not continue, or ones who do, will continue to offer friendly support to the efforts they made with the support of The Carter Center and to the people who may replace them. I was somewhat skeptical at the beginning, and I left utterly convinced of the need for the group to continue operating, even beyond what was agreed upon in the binational meeting in Bogotá.

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Dolores Padilla  
Between Ecuador and Colombia: The People

Many things cross the border: products, contraband, glyphosate, and violence but also affections, perceptions, relationships between family and friends, between legal and illegal businesses, between needs and shared dreams. On the other side of the river and the bridge, life takes on a pace that makes us one people.

This is how "the community" grows. When the people recognize the same vulnerabilities and scarcities, when identities and feelings of belonging materialize in collective action as the only tool for resisting the absence of the state, basic services, and the protection of basic rights, solidarity emerges to replace loneliness but also as an alternative way to exchange information about different ways of living, mechanisms for subsistence, conflicts, and displaced persons.

While the international businesses of drugs and armed conflict continue to inflict their multiple, painful consequences on the Colombian territory, they also cross the border.

In the last decade, Ecuador has received hundreds of thousands of displaced Colombians from the war that ravages our brother country. The lack of understanding of the conflict blurs the names, and hence people are classified: “legals” and “illegals,” “refugees,” and “denieds.” On many occasions, we spoke with refugee associations, and they all indicated that in the midst of all of their challenges, the one source of support they could count on was the warm reception offered by the people of Ecuador.

This social capital, understood as "the capacity for collective action that people develop over a foundation of social trust and norms of reciprocity and compromise," is what holds the greatest potential for offering concrete responses and sustainable alternatives for the situation along our border.

The Awá, Cofán, and Pasto peoples reclaim the recognition of the unified nature of their territory; the mayors find themselves engaged in common projects to resolve their common problems; entrepreneurs sustain an important flow of relationships; independent fishermen on both sides of the Mataje River demand a joint training facility; the civic forces from Ipiales and Tulcán proclaim that we have a common destiny in the streets.

Regarding that common destiny, the president of the Women’s Federation of Lago Agrio and the secretary of the Amazonian Front told us in an interview:

We are coordinating with the Colombian sisters, and we say that we have only an imaginary border, although at the national level, they call us the cuckoos of Colombia, but we among women have had good coordination. In November of 2007 we had a binational meeting at the Rumichaca Bridge, where we had more than 10,000 women, and it was very emotional to see how Ecuador and Colombia are perceived, when the reality is different; as a result, this helped us and strengthened our bonds with our Colombian sisters. We have a very good relationship.

The Binational Dialogue Group identified an opportunity for a binational development plan to serve as a major instrument for improving the capaci-

33 A concept further developed by N. Lechner in the article “How will we rebuild us (Cómo reconstruir el nosotros?)” in the magazine Foro Social, Bogotá, 2007.
ties and strengths in the border zone between the two countries, as long as it is developed and executed with the participation of the people, their direct representatives, and the social and political actors involved in the area.

The three borders that unite us have a rich social, cultural, and political diversity; at the same time they confront many complexities. The action of the national governments and institutions has become essential at different levels and degrees. But it will be the social networks, the consciousness of their actors, and the influence of the local governments that will determine the future.

Without a doubt, the experience has created knowledge. The Binational Dialogue Group allowed us to know, and re-create in depth, the realities and tensions that make us neighbors. We learned to appreciate the elements that we share and the distance between the perceptions found in Quito and Bogotá. We knew to highlight the importance and validity of tolerance and respect for democratic values, but we also recognized the need to bring the basic principles of honor and dignity with us to the negotiating table.

The people of the group transformed this process into a testimony of their patriotism and effectiveness in crucial moments of confrontation and crisis. The situation forced us first to persist as a team and second to expand our views and understanding, which allowed us to return and rejoin the rest of society and, through this dialogue, renew hope.

A former deputy in the Ecuadorian congress, Dolores Padilla has written widely on topics such as gender, children and adolescents, and education. She has been involved in social projects and alternative development. She has expertise in facilitating dialogue processes and negotiating conflicts. She founded the NGOs Eve of the Apple (Eva de la Manzana), the Institute of Family Studies (Instituto de Estudios Familiares), and the Center for Support and Information for Women (Centro de Información y Apoyo a la Mujer). In 2004 she was a candidate for vice president of the republic with León Roldós Aguilera.
Francisco Carrión Mena
Understanding the Other Side’s Reality

On the Carter Center’s initiative, under the auspices of the United Nations Development Program, the Binational Dialogue Group between Ecuador and Colombia was established in 2007, made up of male and female citizens from the two countries who were interested in promoting closer relations between both societies. The chosen members were ideologically diverse and had backgrounds in widely different spheres of public action, but we shared a commitment to embracing a dynamic of frank and purposeful dialogue based on the perspective that it would be mutually beneficial. We decided to participate in this forum with the objective of improving our understanding of the other side’s perspective and to approach the enterprise with a civic-minded, open, and well-intentioned outlook.

The circumstances under which this initiative was born were not ideal in terms of bilateral relations, despite the fact that historically these two countries had been able to build close and constructive ties. From the beginning of the decade, relations between Colombia and Ecuador started to deteriorate due to the impact of the Colombian conflict on Ecuador, and gradually this distance grew to be more and more apparent. It is perhaps for this reason that the implementation of a dialogue process like this proved necessary and opportune.

After a year and a half in progress, after six binational meetings, and after numerous national meetings, the exercise undertaken by the Binational Dialogue Group has had overwhelmingly positive results in terms of the objectives for which it was created. After the first round of catharsis and identifying the problems confronted by both countries, group members were able to understand the other country’s reasoning and needs and came to value the opportunities presented by bilateral relations.

One of the greatest achievements, if not the greatest, is the knowledge and understanding we gained about the other’s reality. Perhaps coming in wrapped up in our own reality, we had not stopped to understand what was happening on the other side of the border. The Binational Dialogue Group offered us this precious and essential opportunity. Through our discussions and conversations — some more formal than others, but all of them frank — we learned much about the dramatic and difficult Colombian reality: about violence entrenched as a fixture of everyday life, about a people yearning to be free of such brutality. We learned, too, about the effects that this situation has created for Ecuadorian society, removed and uninformed about what was happening on the other side of the border.

The members of the Binational Dialogue Group were also able to spread to the public and various official institutions, in our respective professional spheres and fields of influence, the experiences we had and the importance of using dialogue to resolve the differences between our governments, which are, ultimately, the parties responsible for resolving them. There was no shortage of academic forums, news, and public opinion articles promoted by the Binational Dialogue Group in both countries to debate the situation from perspectives that went beyond the government line. Special recognition is deserved for the participation of social actors in the border zones, because they are most directly affected by their conflict-ridden environment and most committed to resolving it.

We know that exercises such as the one led by the Binational Dialogue Group are long-term projects that will face setbacks, even grave ones like the events of March 1, 2008, but I believe that we must persevere for these environments because they are
needed to foster understanding between people above the moment’s political fray. For the rest, I believe that experiences such as this one provide personal and human enrichment that only benefits our countries by bringing them closer.

A great deal of recognition is owed to The Carter Center and its team, who have encouraged the members of the Binational Dialogue Group with dedication and determination to sustain our desire to contribute, as citizens, to the project and to the parallel understanding that needs to be taken on by our governments.

Francisco Carrión Mena is general coordinator of the Andes Monitoring Center for Foreign Policy in FLACSO. A career diplomat, he served as minister of foreign relations (2005–2007), ambassador to Spain (2000–2005), and a member of the commission negotiating peace with Peru from 1996 to 1998. He writes a daily column in El Comercio in Quito.
Gonzalo Ruiz Alvarez
Defeating Prejudices, Building Bridges

In the last three months of 2007, I received a phone call from Kelly McBride, the Carter Center’s representative in Ecuador, who wanted to speak with me about an initiative that could be both an interesting experience on the personal level and an important contribution on the public level.

We met at a hotel in Quito for breakfast and she pitched the idea to me: The Carter Center, whose initiatives on political dialogue were widely known in the region, was building a framework, with assistance from the United Nations Development Program—which had implemented a series of projects in Ecuador to provide assistance to Colombian refugees displaced by the civil war in their country—for the constitution of a binational dialogue group consisting of Ecuadorians and Colombians. Kelly told me that this would be an interdisciplinary group from both countries to discuss and propose issues of common interest for both societies to build a positive agenda for their countries. The group included diplomats, academics, political actors, local leaders from the border area, and people with close personal relationships to both sitting governments—who had some access to power without themselves serving as government officials. In addition, it would include a group of journalists from different media outlets.

One of the central objectives—after we got to know each other on a personal level and were able to express and address our concerns—was to serve as a positive influence for creating a situation of understanding and peace between the citizens of both nations.

In addition, the organizers of the group presented us with a premise: that the group members would be approved by the governments to encourage flexibility for the group’s initiatives. When I learned of this requirement, I immediately warned that in my endeavors as an opinion journalist, I had maintained a critical stance that was respectful but independent of the ruling regime in Ecuador, and that if my name would be an obstacle to achieving the project’s high goals, I would abstain from participation.

That’s how, after some consultations, I was informed that there was no problem with any aspect of my participation, and I learned the names of some of the other Ecuadorian members who had decided to join this good will initiative that would require us to follow a precise agenda of four meetings between November 2007 and May 2008.

The first meeting was in Atlanta, the city in the south of the United States where The Carter Center is headquartered. In the United States, presidents retire with a fund to help establish their own libraries and centers for study. The Democrat and former U.S. President Jimmy Carter wanted his center to fulfill a special purpose: He sought support and private donations and extended his sphere of action to different countries in which he enjoyed recognition. Every day, the Carter Center’s efforts in the spheres of health and strengthening democracy have earned universal recognition. The Center also houses a museum with all of the documents from President Carter’s presidential term, photographs of major world events in which he was involved as president of the United States (the Torrijos–Carter agreements, the Camp David Accords for peace in the Middle East), countless personal mementos, a replica of the Oval Office, and a gift shop that sells items that commemorate his presidency. There are two large auditoriums, offices, and showrooms that display the most precious out of the hundreds of collected items that are received by the president of one of the most influential countries in the world. All of this is surrounded by an exuberant natural garden crisscrossed by different walking paths, some birds, and even a pond with different multicolored fish. Needless to say, in this environment your mind functions more clearly, ideas flow, and they are nourished by the sense of calm and good vibrations.

This is where we arrived in late November 2007. The meetings got under way with the majority of the participants present. In the Ecuadorian case, we could say that all of us knew each other through our professional fields and that our level of internal dialogue,
despite our different perspectives, was smooth. We noticed the same thing about the Colombian group, despite our naturally differing interpretations of the situation we were addressing.

Certainly we will not forget the frank, harsh statements made during the first hours of the meeting. The furrowed brows in response to the confrontational statements of the other attendees and the expressive exchange of opinions produced what one of the members called our “initial catharsis.” It was like unleashing the distrust and distant, sometimes simplistic positions brought to the negotiating table by the group with the stereotypes and prejudices that are also a part of the human condition.

Reviewing the published materials on this bilateral relationship—many of which were composed by or contributed to by group members Socorro Ramírez and Adrián Bonilla and even the Ecuadorian Foreign Ministry under the management of Francisco Carrión Mena, another active participant in the group—some of the most pronounced prejudices are clearly observed. The conscious or unconscious association of Colombians with criminal activity was repeated without restraint by official sources—especially the police and the mass media in their generalizations. It was a common idea that flourished even in the academic publications analyzed. The Colombians, for their part, viewed Ecuadorians over their shoulder, with a certain disparaging attitude, and denoted them their “little brothers to the south.” In addition, in Colombia there is the idea that Ecuador understands neither the intensity of Colombia’s internal conflict nor the impact that the destruction caused by kidnapping, guerrilla groups, drug trafficking, and other forms of violence has had on society.

These stereotypes were a departure from the official discourse that spoke of two nations like brothers with a common origin and history in search of shared prosperity. And they took a stronger and stronger hold. Identifying these stereotypes was a problem that a group of this nature could actually take on and attempt to help overcome, without losing sight of the immense potential for a culture with the same roots, fertile trade opportunities, and a shared future.

The notion that we are blessed or condemned to share hundreds of kilometers of border between our nations had to be incorporated into the picture, along with all of the potential aspects that could be used to the benefit of citizens in both nations.

Once we had overcome these prejudices, after openly bringing our resentments and distrust to the dialogue table—without any airbrushing and sometimes without even tact—we began to suggest constructive proposals that would pave the way for future progress, and we contributed to an atmosphere that encouraged the exchange of our most hopeful and deepest opinions.

The opening remarks by President Carter, his serene voice, and his decision to bet on this endeavor served as the wisdom that guided our actions in the project we undertook at that moment, with the conviction of having just opened the gates to unleash the first heated discussion in the multidisciplinary Binational Dialogue Group.

Next we arrived at the second meeting in Quito, a meeting marked by optimism and good intentions. After an exhaustive initial review of the political events that had taken place in each country and a brilliant presentation of facts and statistics on the economic and trade situation—as well as a fantastic presentation on the situation of the refugees and displaced persons offered by the office of the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees, which manages an impressive agenda in Ecuador—we defined a set of next steps. Cultural projects and meetings with communities, publication exchange through different media outlets so that the public in each country could hear about the other side’s little-understood reality, and other interesting initiatives helped to untangle the mess of concerns that dominated the first meeting in Atlanta—prior to the catharsis—to put concrete issues on the table and add action to the positive agenda. Everything ran smoothly.

The Colombian military attack on the FARC encampment—an irregular, illegal, and armed force—in Angostura, on Ecuadorian territory, an attack that resulted in the death of “Raúl Reyes,” the
second in command of the guerilla group, forced the Ecuadorian government to reject the incursion and led to the termination of formal diplomatic relations between the two countries. As of March 1, 2008, the efforts to promote the positive agenda seemed dead in their tracks, and the possible future meetings of the group seemed uncertain.

Only our determination and conviction to accomplish with a renewed sense of optimism the goals that brought us together in the first place allowed the group to continue its course. It should be recognized that, once the uncertainty around what happened during the March 1 bombing attack on the “Reyes” camp in Ecuador had been overcome, the small missions of group members to engage with the other country’s members, and the postponement—as opposed to suspension—of the upcoming meeting planned for Bogotá saved the situation. At first we were concerned; then we felt free of obligation; but ultimately we reaffirmed the urgency and legitimacy of unofficial enterprises such as this one to serve as forums for mature reflection and integrity in which to vent about our differences as civil members of society, express our concerns, and establish shared steps for the future.

The meeting in Santa Fe de Bogotá, which was almost postponed, was very intense. In addition to hearing the perspectives and points of view of different ground-level actors in Colombian society and its political establishment, we watched an expert presentation by our fellow group member, the governor of Nariño, Antonio Navarro Wolff, a former member of the M-19 guerilla forces who signed a peace agreement with the government of Virgilio Barco. During this presentation, Antonio offered us a brilliant lesson on the ongoing violence in Colombia, its root causes, and the current situation of the FARC, which illuminated the situation for everyone present. Once again, and after many hours of shared dialogue, we established the deeper meaning of sovereignty for Ecuador and the profound reactions it brings up for Ecuadorians when it is referenced.

I think, in whatever particular way, each of us learned to understand, respect, and appreciate the other side’s reasons for what they were—which is the only possible path for a productive dialogue and mutual understanding.

We arrived once more in Atlanta toward the end of May 2008. Also in attendance was the Chilean secretary-general of the Organization of American States, José Miguel Insulza, who after the Colombian attack on Angostura had used his good offices (good, on this occasion) to try to bring both country’s governments closer together. His analysis of the situation was relevant, and once again the hours of collective reflection were productive, but without a doubt the highlight came when President Carter told us that he had spoken with the commanders in chief of Ecuador and Colombia and that their reactions indicated their openness to a possible re-establishment of relations between their countries.

This is how the group came to decide to extend its mandate in pursuit of creating the right atmosphere for relaunching its objectives. At that point, there was even more urgency than there had been in the beginning: Re-establishing diplomatic relations between the two nations became a necessary first step for completing any other initiative, as always with the modest, low-profile approach to the group and the individual actions of its members.

The group held two good will meetings with President Álvaro Uribe and President Rafael Correa. The good impression left in the first meeting was steamrolled by the abrupt conclusion of the second. It seemed that, once again, things were precipitated by sources of tension between the two nations, whose heads of state have nursed wounds from bitter verbal injuries after the bombardment in Angostura.
The group postponed its next meetings and decided that it would only meet in late November 2008 in Quito and in May 2009 in Bogotá.

The presence of President Carter in Ecuador, a day after the re-election of Rafael Correa, had opened the door to another possible reconciliation, but this appearance had more to do with good will and collective hopes than with the serious possibility of a diplomatic rapprochement between the two countries.

A joint document that would conclude the first phase and express the expectations for future phases was ready to be finished.

With the first phase concluded, other items on the political and legal agenda of both countries overshadowed the issue.

A judge in Sucumbíos decided to prosecute former Colombian Minister of Defense Juan Manuel Santos for murder, based on the events in Angostura. In reply, a group of attorneys requested a trial in the International Criminal Court for the president of Ecuador, Rafael Correa. They also called for the prosecution on drug-trafficking charges of former Ecuadorian Minister Gustavo Larrea, who had met with “Raúl Reyes,” and Deputy Secretary Ignacio Chauvín, who had admitted to visiting the FARC base camp for humanitarian reasons.

As one might imagine, these episodes renewed tension between the countries. Their relationship deteriorated even further with an increase in the hostile tone of public statements.

Based on the political agenda of both governments, along with the strong personalities of both leaders, neither party currently seems interested in improving relations between their countries, much less re-establishing diplomatic relations.

Colombia is Ecuador’s second-largest trading partner, but the lack of established customs arrangements does not paint a hopeful picture for the improvement of trade relations; in fact it is likely to complicate them even further.

When we came together to begin the process of the Binational Dialogue Group, we brought along our prejudices and doubts, but we rose above our own limited perspectives to take a sincere look and ultimately to accept the reasons presented by the other side.

I sincerely believe that I contributed, beyond the collective decision to maintain a low public profile for the group, by encouraging academic and public opinion circles to think about our rich common history, our shared culture, and the history that unites us and to understand the differences that need to be overcome with good will, whether they are deeply rooted or of the moment.

I believe that some issues still need to be settled. Their solutions lie in diplomacy and in the hands of the political institutions of our nations; sooner or later those institutions should follow the path to direct, frank dialogue in order to first re-establish diplomatic relations and build trust—trust that will allow us to meet face to face, clearly express our distinct perceptions, and seriously examine the major points of disagreement—to find solutions for the common benefit of our nations.

One pending issue that requires teamwork and should not be delayed is the situation involving our citizens along the border. With their cultural exchange, commercial transactions, and authentic expressions of sympathy and brotherhood, they could teach a lesson to the national governments and to society at large about how to build a civilized relationship that fosters development.

The struggle against our common enemies—poverty, drug trafficking, violence, and unemployment—should show us how to walk a course together in search of a better life.

The daily political agenda of the central governments should not prevent this bilateral relationship from being flexible, respectful, and of the first order, both in our diplomatic corps and in our high-level political institutions.

Our problems with our neighbors are always an easy decoy to distract us from our own real internal problems. There is always an election around the corner that justifies the pretext for a confrontation. Above all, however, we will always need to overcome these small-minded issues in pursuit of the friendly relationship demanded by our common history.

Everything has a beginning and an end. The hours
of discussion, joint initiatives, and exchange of perspectives between the members of the Binational Dialogue Group provided an enriching intellectual experience and a genuine learning experience, with a sincere attempt to understand the reasons of the other side and overcome our natural human tendency to act as if we alone know the absolute truth and the immanent premises with which human beings tend to confront any difficulty.

Knowing and appreciating the talent and intelligence of my fellow group members, my compatriots, and my Colombian brothers have taught me a great deal, but it leaves me with the frustration, as it does many other members, of not being able to fulfill the goal of re-establishing diplomatic relations as we dreamed of doing. Now new winds and newer, fresher initiatives will come that—I am sure—we will watch from a close distance to support, celebrate, and strengthen.

Thanks to everyone, especially The Carter Center, President Carter, and the UNDP, who invited me to this opportunity to meet these individuals of such intellect, men and women of state, intelligent and well-trained, whom I will admire for the rest of my life and who gave me an opportunity to learn something new about myself.

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For a long while, relations between Ecuador and Colombia have not gone well. The conditions under which Plan Colombia was applied along its border to the south made friction inevitable. The pressure from the military activity against the FARC forced thousands of Colombians to seek refuge in Ecuador in search of safety. This migration was not accompanied by any neighborly support policy, through which the Colombian government might have helped obtain international cooperation for the refugees or paid for the costs of humanitarian aid. In addition to the wave of migrants, there was the issue of aerial glyphosate and Cosmo-Flux fumigations that caused harmful health effects, routinely reported by the residents of downwind areas along the border, from Esmeraldas to Sucumbíos.

Colombia was not brought to the negotiating table to discuss these issues until 2005, the year that the government of Lucio Gutiérrez was deposed by a popular revolution in Quito and a transitional regime had been installed in the Carondelet palace. The fact that the issues with Colombia turned into one of the rallying points in that revolution was an undeniable sign that the state of the binational relationship had reached the limit at which the conditions of democratic stability become aggravated by the lack of solutions to the issue. Among the many things that the so-called outlaw’s rebellion brought to light was a rejection of the way that the administration of Lucio Gutiérrez had managed its foreign policy and in particular the way it had neglected issues of serious importance for the general public and the poorest groups along the border, such as the refugee situation and the health-damaging aerial spraying.

The transition regime and its different foreign ministers, Antonio Parra Gil and Francisco Carrión Mena, started a debate that had not existed in the past. When President Rafael Correa took office, however, the issue gained momentum, and the arguments about the aerial fumigations and refugees became a central area of focus for the new president’s foreign policy. By then, relations were practically comatose. For this reason, when the creation of the Binational Dialogue Group was proposed in February 2007, it struck me as a great opportunity to establish a baseline over which to talk directly about our problems, examine the discordant perspectives between the two countries, and, above all, to discuss ways to bring this understanding to the public.

The Ecuadorian side, of which I am a part, was in a very difficult situation. First, the fact that a country that is supposed to be our brother, our neighbor, could attack our territory at any time without hesitation aroused an old fundamental suspicion. What were the limits of Colombia’s military strategy? What happened to the concepts of sovereignty, respect, and trust, the basic principles that form the foundation for relationships between nation states? Beyond that, the entire incident at Angostura was a demonstration of Colombia’s condescension toward Ecuador; that is, Ecuador is always subordinated to Colombia’s needs, interests, and time constraints. A few days after the military assault, a moral assault was launched in the form of more accusations about the supposedly incestuous relationship between the government of Ecuador and the FARC guerrillas. The juxtaposition of events and Colombia’s accusations only stoked the fires of distrust and separation. Since then, nothing has been the same. At the same time, however, someone has to make something from the ashes that used
to be the relationship between the two countries—a rebuilding undertaken this time not by the diplomatic representatives on each side but instead by individuals and social groups that want to attempt to at least sustain the good will that once existed between the two countries.

The Binational Dialogue Group brought together individuals with a strong desire to keep the ties between the two countries alive and, if possible, re-establish the broken relations. After several failed meetings with different Ecuadorian and Colombian authorities and a failed lunch with President Correa, the group began to question its own role, work, and real possibilities of being able to achieve anything—even a peaceful setting.

I joined during the middle of this redefinition period. In September 2008 I was invited to participate, along with two other new additions to the Ecuadorian side: Pedro Velasco, the mayor of Tulcán, and Patricia Estupiñán, the editor of the magazine Vistazo and a resident of Guayaquil. The three of us were full of energy and ideas to bring to the group. We believed strongly in the role that civil society should play in pressuring the government to take action to protect the interests of the weak and in supporting the government when its own diplomatic channels have failed or faltered.

To me, the Binational Dialogue Group is composed of individuals of good will who sought to understand the perspective of the other side, other state, other people and attempted to find ways—sometimes creative and visionary ways—to establish a common agenda through which we could find understanding and develop something out of the agreements we already have.

It’s true that the majority of us had different expectations. Some of us had truly ambitious expectations; others were more modest. In all cases, we could come together in agreement on certain issues: peace, good will between neighboring nations, the need to prevent any further deterioration, and the conviction that without the close involvement of civil society, the political and governing class will continue to focus on their differences, on what separates us instead of what unites us. This was always my belief. International relations have radically changed since the 19th century. In the past, 90 percent of what happened with diplomacy, war, or peace depended entirely on the commanders in chief and their administrations. Now, in the age of globalization; democracy; and free, open, and engaged societies, international relations are a multilateral game in which the governments determine 10 percent of the issues, if that. As a result, after diplomatic relations were terminated on March 3, 2008, the many other types of relationships between the countries—trade, economic, financial, social, tourism-related, and local—continued to function, and sometimes even to strengthen, as happened in Tulcán. There, several proposals for joint waste management agreements with the neighboring municipality of Ipiales were put into effect.

The work of the Binational Dialogue Group has taught me that no door is ever closed—even the people who are considered to have the most radical views on the situation between Ecuador and Colombia are willing to mend fences for individuals who need things to change. This is what transpired during the lunch to which the group was invited by President Rafael Correa on March 19, 2009. That was the point at which I felt that collaborative efforts yield better results. Two hours before the lunch, the group met to discuss what we wanted to accomplish during the lunch, but mostly we discussed what our attitude would be. We all agreed that, above all, we needed
to arrive willing to listen. Then we decided that we would focus on the most urgent of our common problems that were likely to be acceptable, as a fact of the dialogue process, for both parties.

The lunch was very positive. We heard what the president of Ecuador wanted to say, and one by one, we presented our concerns, always drawing attention to the local or border-level aspects that needed to be resolved, leaving the matter of diplomatic relations to the side. This approach stimulated the interest of the Ecuadorian president, who asked us for more information on these topics but also indicated that any and all local initiatives geared toward development would be welcomed and that he was in no way opposed to the local governments advancing binational projects. Only this affirmation validated our many months of work, because with a presidential blessing for these types of projects, many people along the border stand to benefit from that cooperation. The president’s encouragement legitimized the participation of local governments and active community organizations to alleviate the living conditions of the poorest residents along each side of the border. This experience and the interactions that followed allowed us to have renewed hope and also forced us to recognize that it is better to tackle smaller obstacles to understanding between the two countries before tackling larger ones. The governments are responsible for handling and developing strategies to resolve the major and minor issues that can damage or extinguish the relationship.

From that point on, we viewed the Binational Dialogue Group as a catalyst for different processes or as a type of communication channel for establishing constructive dialogues that have not found a natural forum and that need support in getting established or, in this case, re-established. The group came to understand, during my time as a member, that it was much more fruitful to mend small fences with good will and take advantage of any forum for generating peaceful dialogues, rather than establishing major strategies that, without the will of the political leaders, are destined for failure. We also learned that dialogue is the only path for understanding any process of growing apart as grave and wide-reaching as the one that affected Ecuador and Colombia.

Maybe this understanding can lead to a second phase in which the real, everyday stewards of this binational relationship can reclaim their leadership of its course. After all, they are the ones—the ones who live with the consequences of the violence in Colombia, with drug trafficking, every day, but who also live around the commercial, social, and cultural exchange every day—who want to build bridges both with the central and local governments and hope to experience a better life because of them.

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Luz María Sierra

An Oxygen Tank for a Critical Situation

I have to confess that, as a journalist, I agreed to join the Binational Dialogue Group in large part out of curiosity. I have always liked experiments, and the Carter Center’s proposal to make such a particular selection of different people from each of the two countries held a great deal of interest for me.

The exercise itself was also interesting. It makes a lot of sense to bring together influential people from economic, central and local government, and media circles and ask them to brainstorm ways to prevent the ties between two countries from becoming destroyed in a difficult political situation.

The most surprising thing, in the beginning, was realizing how completely uninformed the members of each group were about the other country. And the most satisfying thing was to watch how, over the course of time, after explanations and moments of insight, we wound up speaking almost the same language.

This lack of knowledge of what was happening in the other country as the two countries have points of friction between them is complicated and can lead to tragedy if, for some reason, small irritations are aggravated further, as had been happening between Colombia and Ecuador.

And if our lack of awareness—we who were supposedly well-informed and qualified to have dialogue with our counterparts—was this extensive, what kind of notions were floating around in the public consciousness of the other side? It could be a disaster.

The journalist’s mindset, which others would call shortsightedness, made me one of the most skeptical members regarding what the group could really achieve. As I saw it, neither the interests of either president nor their personal temperaments were likely to favor a solution.

From a media standpoint, in the structure of the BDG there were two positive outcomes and two negative ones. We could not achieve two of the initiatives that we proposed: a joint documentary broadcast on two television networks in each country and a workshop for journalists from both countries. In both cases, from what I understand, we encountered problems of a logistical nature.

As far as the positive outcomes, it was abundantly clear that the editorials and columns published by members of the group facilitated the creation of a foundation for building the public’s understanding. Without a positive environment, it would have been very difficult to reach an agreement. For example, in the magazine Semana, we published some articles on the subject, in particular a profile of Ecuador’s President Rafael Correa on which many Ecuadorian members of the BDG collaborated. I believe that revealing the different layers of a public figure of his stature to show Colombian readers that, among other things, he is more than an unconditional ally of President Hugo Chávez, as he has been painted, will also help create an environment for reconciliation.

My skepticism started to crack a little with the projects at the border led by several of my companions from the BDG, and it was shattered further when I realized that the existence of a group like this, in the diplomatic arena, can serve as an oxygen tank when all other normal courses of dialogue are failing.

And the most important thing of all: I have no doubt that the reflections by some of the members of the group who have interactions with the Foreign
Ministry, at least in the Colombian case, were fundamental in making the government understand the strategic error it had been committing in not taking all of the necessary steps to make peace with its Ecuadorian neighbor.

For me this was an enriching experience. I gained many tools for my professional life, most importantly a thorough analysis of our relationship with Ecuador. It was an honor to share the experience of the group with all of my counterparts, all brave individuals in their own fields. And I was delighted to see the Carter Center’s sincere commitment to encouraging a positive relationship between our countries.

**Luz María Sierra** is general editor of the magazine Semana. She was the director of editing for the newspaper El Tiempo. She has also served as an editor on judicial and international issues for the same publication. She was Cabinet director in the Foreign Ministry and a communications adviser for the Ministry of Education. She has also worked for the newspaper El Mundo of Medellín, the Presidential Advisory Council for Medellín, and the Javieriana and Andes universities.
The Binational Relationship Is Alive at the Border

I believe that the group’s most substantial contribution was the mutual understanding of each country’s reality that we all gained in our particular fields of influence. It let us call attention to the other country’s situation and endeavor to contribute to the reconstruction of this binational relationship in a framework of understanding and collaboration.

I believe that my main contribution to the Binational Dialogue Group was knowledge of the border reality in my department, Putumayo, which is different from that of the department of Nariño. I think that in the Binational Forum in Pasto, which took place in February 2009, everyone noted the clear necessity of considering the Amazonian portion of the border as something separate from the Andean and Pacific portions.

I think that the group would have benefited from more direct activity along the border. Although the activities in Bogotá and Quito were important, the binational reality is located at the border, and I believe we should have spent more time working in that environment.

I believe that the Binational Dialogue Group should have continued working just to promote the return of diplomatic relations beginning at the border, in its three different zones, with organized civil society and local authorities.

I believe that the event in Pasto was very important. Later, the meetings with President Uribe and President Correa, despite the discrepancies and tense moments, helped us to understand that rebuilding this binational relationship will be a task that requires more than just the will of the governments in Bogotá and Quito.

Guillermo Rivera is a congressional representative from the department of Putumayo. He belongs to the first permanent constitutional committee and is also a member of the Peace Commission. In July 2006 he was elected by the Partido Liberal political party as their representative in the Chamber of Representatives. He is an attorney from the Universidad Externado de Colombia, and he has degrees in civil law, political science, and international relations.
The Carter Center

Binational Dialogue: Ecuador—Colombia

**Luis Carlos Villegas Echeverri**

**The Message Has Been Sent**

I have a great impression of those months I spent participating in the Binational Dialogue Group. The interdisciplinary contact was the most educational aspect of the experience, especially when you consider that, by the end of the exercise, everyone wound up agreeing on the transcendence of the bilateral relationship and the urgency of re-establishing diplomatic dialogue. It gave me great satisfaction to be a part of developing our mutual understanding, especially when we started on such bad terms. We would have benefited from more of a presence by President Carter, especially in Colombia. And I would have liked a little more creativity and to see us try out new processes beyond the somewhat stiff method used by the UNDP.

As I said in Atlanta, I learned that Colombians and Ecuadorians are not similar: We are the same! I hope I helped convey to my fellow members that, although the economic relationship between the two countries is very important, even in the midst of major crises, it must be left alone.

It was important to have the opportunity to participate in significant initiatives such as what we called the “small steps” in the beginning and later in the discreet efforts to re-establish diplomatic relations. We did not achieve concrete results in the area of bilateral relations, which is a real shame, but our message to the governments, that there are citizens on each side working together for the good of their nations, has been sent to the highest levels. I believe this work can help to avoid new crises in the future.

What things could have been improved about the process? Perhaps we should examine whether the way we announced it was appropriate, given the sensitivities of our most distinguished negotiators, who are both permanently campaigning.

Thinking about the future, I believe that the Binational Dialogue Group should be capable of being immediately reactivated in any future crisis. It would also be good for us to meet periodically to bring everyone back up to date.

**Luis Carlos Villegas Echeverri** is president of the National Business Association of Colombia, which includes the major players in the Colombian business world. He was a senator and governor of the department of Risaralda. He was president of the Financial Corporation of Western South America, the National Labor Council, the Business Association Europe—Latin America, the Andean Industrial Council, and the board of directors of the Fund for the Reconstruction and Social Development of the Coffee-producing Region.

**Colombians and Ecuadorians are not similar: We are the same!**
As a member of the Binational Dialogue Group, the fundamental lesson I took from this experience was demonstrating, once again, that a group comprising individuals from diverse countries can find ways to resolve members’ common problems. Our group included participants from Colombia and Ecuador from various fields: business, politics, grassroots activism, academia, journalism, and others. Despite our disparate backgrounds, we were able to initiate a dialogue and, from that foundation, come to a better understanding of the other’s point of view: the other country, the other sector, the other perspective. When we started, the group members had very different views of the state of the relationship between Ecuador and Colombia. In the end we achieved a much fuller comprehension of the other’s views and even came to share many views in common. On this foundation, we were better able to grasp the nature of the conflict between our two countries and design strategies to improve our relations.

The group knew to approach these difficult moments from a place of understanding and discover a way out of them by trying to positively influence relations between the two countries.

The circumstances could have been better. Actually, they had never been worse, and they seemed to grow more difficult, more complex, and ever more faceted each day. The group knew to approach these difficult moments from a place of understanding and discover a way out of them by trying to positively influence relations between the two countries. In summary, some of the group’s greatest contributions were its promotion of dialogue, its ability to exert influence, and its perseverance.

This dialogue experience allowed me to better understand the other side’s perspective and the nature of the conflict between our countries and, thus, to spread this knowledge and understanding to a wider audience. Another important result of this experience was the way the Binational Dialogue Group was able to create a series of multiplier effects on other activities: It created new dynamics in the border zones through dialogue with local authorities, academic exchanges, etc. Just yesterday I was in Ipiales with a Colombian group member, Antonio Navarro Wolff, who is the governor of Nariño. We were discussing how we could collaborate on a project that would provide agricultural support to small farmers in the south of the Nariño department. That is to say, even beyond the activities the group itself completed, those activities had a multiplying effect into other activities.

I hope that the initiative I have with Antonio Navarro Wolff comes to fruition during the next months. We already have a plan of action. The Nariño department — and especially its southern zone — has similar characteristics to the northern sierra of Ecuador. There is a great deal of continuity in terms of culture, agroecology, agrarian structures, climate. Nariño is a zone with small producers, and it has mountainous areas. Like many areas with these characteristics, economic activity is difficult there.

For quite some time, Antonio Navarro Wolff has sought ways to stimulate the rural economy of this region of Nariño, and as a result, here in Ecuador we have had an extremely interesting experience in organizing rural production for export markets for things like broccoli. While there are some larger farmers involved in this activity, there are also smaller farmers involved who have less than a hectare of land. Thanks to organization, some training, and some empowerment and with the right support systems, many small Ecuadorian producers have successfully emerged from difficult situations. We are evaluating to what extent this experience with linking up small producers with larger trade dynamics can be replicated in Nariño. During that visit to Ipiales (June 2009), I was joined by a friend who was familiar with
this Ecuadorian experience. We met with Antonio Navarro Wolff, with a technical team, with local authorities from Ipiales, and with farmers, as well as with journalists—some 30 or 40 people in all. In addition to reviewing this experience, we had an interesting discussion, and we established a working agenda for the future. In a few weeks, some technical experts from Ecuador will return to Nariño to evaluate how things have gone there and the possibility for providing support. We want to see whether it’s possible to interest some of the major producers there to invest in the project and promote synergy in that region. Finally, what really interested both Antonio Navarro Wolff and me was not only to have a success with this project in this zone but to demonstrate that together we could accomplish truly significant things.

Another interesting aspect of the binational dialogue initiative was how we were able to come together as an Ecuadorian group and interact as one with the Colombian group, at the same time that both groups came together in the encompassing Binational Dialogue Group. That was a very satisfying achievement for me. I believe I contributed some lessons on Ecuador’s political situation to the group—on its political and economic context and on the nature and characteristics of our government. I also contributed some elements on the subjects of economics, commerce, and trade as well as how to maintain economic and other relations in the midst of a political conflict. I contributed on many practical levels as well, such as the recent experience working on the border that I related here or through my column in one of the country’s most important publications, El Universo. In my column, every once in a while, I have been able to comment on the Ecuador–Colombia situation and to try to influence public opinion.

Although one could get the impression that we have failed, because instead of overall improvement in the relations between these two countries, they now lack even formal diplomatic relations, the reasons for this situation fell far outside the scope of our control or influence. In this difficult context, however, by keeping this dialogue mechanism open, we helped to keep the conflict from escalating any further. In addition, the group had the flexibility to adjust its strategy and to attempt to influence our governments.

I believe there are some general lessons and reflections that can be taken from our experience. The first is on the nature of the group itself. Overall, the composition, characteristics, and diversity of the group constituted an important achievement. I don’t think we always fully considered how close we wanted certain members of the groups to be with their respective governments, however, because such relationships obviously create a different dynamic. For example, if the group discusses an issue on the agenda for both governments, the participation of the members who are close to them can slant an otherwise independent discussion. Second, although I do believe that we had successes in terms of the agenda and the relevance of many of the activities that evolved from the dialogue, there were other things that we could have done but ultimately did not. This also has to do with the public profile of the group members. We were all busy people, but we should have thought more about which of the actions we pursued would be the most effective. Third, I think we should reflect on the public profile of the Binational Dialogue Group and its influence on public opinion. I don’t have a definitive position on the subject, but in retrospect I wonder if some more public gestures at certain junctures, and, in particular, in the time before the bombing in Angostura, could have had larger repercussions. I wonder if we had called more attention to the conflict and the need to establish channels for dialogue and avoid making unilateral decisions before the bombing, we could have averted such a complete deterioration of bilateral relations. Fourth, we should have thought more about a communications strategy. It’s not that we didn’t manage to publish articles, editorials, and other materials, but I’m talking about something more purposeful, like the creation of a set of communication objectives. Many of these reflections are a posteriori; of course when we started the group, none of us imagined that the situation would get so bad. It’s always easier to see these things after the fact.
Finally, given that we successfully formed this Binational Dialogue Group in which we all shared a commitment to the cause, I hope that we can continue to work to improve the relationship between our countries. Maybe we will incorporate some new members; perhaps some of us want to continue, while others do not. In any case, it’s undeniable that we have unfinished business. The issue is far from resolved. I have moments of optimism when I see the Ecuadorian Minister of Health and the Colombian Minister of Social Protection meeting at the border to collaborate on how to address the H1N1 flu or that the ambassadors from Ecuador and Colombia can discuss the future of the Andean Community of Nations without incident. I also have moments of pessimism, however; I fear that the current situation will persist and that the disruption of diplomatic relations will last for a long time. From our perspective as Ecuadorians, we have not yet finished digesting what happened in Angostura, and I believe that the country will need some form of compensation—not necessarily in economic terms so much as political ones. In this uncertain context for the future of bilateral relations, I believe that maintaining the Binational Dialogue Group is essential. I hope we will find the ways and means to make it so. It would not have to be the same group with the same members and the same strategies. It could be a group with new people and new ideas, but it would be a shame to abandon this initiative, because I think it has so much potential.

I truly hope that we persevere in our efforts. These initiatives need catalysts, but they also need accompanying support. I hope that The Carter Center and former U.S. President Jimmy Carter continue to feel that this is an issue in need of attention, because they can contribute not only to the reestablishment of diplomatic relations between Ecuador and Colombia, but to a new kind of binational pact that can expand the understanding between these two countries, societies, and governments.

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Being selected as a member of the Binational Dialogue Group was a big deal for me. “Wow!” was my reaction to the invitation to become a part of this process, and even more so when I learned that the distinguished other participants approved me to join. Although I am an accomplished woman who recognizes her strengths, I was honored to be considered and to be able to contribute to this binational dialogue between Ecuador and Colombia.

On a personal level, this experience was a moment of enormous growth, because although I have been involved in participation and dialogue processes at a national level, I had not been involved on an international level. Learning a culture of dialogue with Colombian men and women and navigating communications between different cultures have been very valuable experiences. I was able to meet interesting people from Colombia and Ecuador and build, strengthen, and support participation and dialogue from my own experiences. I learned so much. I brought things and I took things away. I think it was crucial to hear about the feelings and perceptions of Ecuador from a Colombian point of view. In the same way, the Colombian members learned about our perceptions of them. I believe that was a lesson for the entire group. Opening up about these different perceptions led to a far more interesting dialogue—far more frank and far more fruitful. In addition, it was truly enlightening to discover that, despite being so close and sharing a common border, we do not all think alike.

At first I wondered what I would say to the other members of the Binational Dialogue Group—some of whom I would have never imagined that I would one day be seated with at the same table. So, when I began to speak up with my own identity, in my own way, based on my own experiences, it was significant for the others to take my contributions seriously. This experience was very empowering for me. It allowed me to position my organization, the Ecuadorian Association of Women in Municipal Government, and the municipality of Quito to take part in actions related to the issues of migration and refugees.

I believe that the path we followed was the right one. In the middle of this dialogue process, we were surprised by the incidents of March 1, 2008, and were thrown into an even more challenging situation. When that happened, we didn’t know how to act. We also learned from our first lunch with President Rafael Correa and the second, which was even better. This was how we learned: in moments of crisis and challenge. We learned about the conflict between two complicated personalities like those of President Álvaro Uribe and President Correa. I believe it was good for us in that sense. We also had failures, but failing is good. We were in the middle of a crisis, but that crisis enabled us to grow. Probably the most difficult aspect of this experience was that the schedules of all of the members were difficult to manage, and we were not always able to find mutually agreeable times. Communication via e-mail can also be dominated by the members who are most familiar with communicating that way.

I believe that my principal contributions to the initiative have been in four areas. First, I brought a local government perspective, because none of the other Ecuadorian members had that background. For this reason, we later involved the mayor of Tulcán, Pedro Velasco. I brought a local government approach to conflict and to the need for dialogue and reconciliation between the two countries.

Second, based on my national leadership position with the Ecuadorian Association of Women in Municipal Government, I was invited to a binational meeting for women in Bogotá. My contributions
were valuable for Ecuadorian women and Colombian women. That is how we came up with the idea of forming a similar group of women in Ecuador to organize another binational meeting.

Third, I have strong management abilities, which enabled me to play an important role on the issue of women, mostly Colombians, who were being sold as slaves and were working at a Quito establishment called the Doll House. When this story came out, I immediately thought to contact the governor of Nariño, Antonio Navarro Wolff, and the mayor of Tulcán, Pedro Velasco, both of whom also belonged to the Binational Dialogue Group. I hoped that they, from their positions near the border, could help me ensure that any Colombian women who had been victimized could return safely to their country and trust that they would be protected. Pedro Velasco immediately responded to me and contacted the mayor of Ipiales. I also got responses from the ombudsman, the Colombian foreign minister, etc. I personally contacted the Colombian Foreign Ministry and received an immediate response. Later, the Ecuadorian Foreign Ministry contacted the Colombian Foreign Ministry. All of these authorities responded and, based on that, formed a binational network for fighting to prevent the slave trade. It is interesting how the binational relationships that have been established thanks to the experience of the Binational Dialogue Group can be applied to other issues that go beyond mere dialogue to the protection of rights. I believe that the credibility my organization gained from this incident was important and also demonstrated the relevance of the Binational Dialogue Group for other issues.

Fourth, I brought a focus on gender to the binational dialogue initiative. I believe it is important to discuss and socialize the topic of gender and the perspective of women in any forum in which I participate or in the discussion of any contemporary issue. Thanks to my participation, other members could reflect on gender issues and the interests of women. The participation of women in the Binational Dialogue Group increased to the point where we are almost on an equal footing.

One of the most striking memories I have is the meeting we had with President Uribe. Ideologically speaking, I have a different perspective than President Uribe: I’m from the left, and President Uribe is from the right. When you open up a dialogue, however, ideological labels should fade and be supplanted by the greater goal of having a positive meeting and being able to have an exchange. Someone suggested that I should present a gift from the Ecuadorian members of the Binational Dialogue Group to President Uribe. I was unsure how I should handle it. I had no idea how President Uribe would react because I had no idea what his personality was like. When he entered the meeting, he was on the defensive; he came in making demands … I thought that he might close off the dialogue from the get-go, but when they started to give me signals to offer the gift to President Uribe, I stood up and said, “Look, Mr. President, we’ve brought you a memento.” When President Uribe saw the rocking horse, he was mesmerized and told me, “Please don’t do this to me, don’t do this to me …” because it awakened his softer side. He withdrew from the defensive posture of his masculine side to a sweeter, softer position because what a gift can do is bestow a bit of happiness on a person, especially when it’s a gift they like, like that rocking horse. At that point he was caught off guard, and I believe that afterward the dialogue had a different tone.

With respect to the future, there are different positions among the members of the Binational Dialogue Group. Some of us think that the binational dialogue
process needs to continue, and others do not. I sometimes think it should draw to a close, but at other moments, I think it would be a shame to waste all of the experience and expertise we already have to start over with another group. A new group would take at least a year to become cohesive, and it would be a year without concrete results. On the other hand, I believe that everyone has a cycle and that this cycle should end to make way for new processes. I believe that in a new phase for this process, we could increase the participants and include new people without starting from square one. For example, we could have half of the members of the current group and the other half new members. This would allow us to evaluate the past processes, exchange experiences, and incorporate the lessons of the previous experience. In particular, we should try to include young leaders. Young people sometimes do not understand why we have borders. They would bring new dynamics, new ideas, and new proposals. So I believe that the ideal scenario would be a balance between younger leaders and ones not so young to enjoy the best combination of experience with youth. I also believe we should maintain the representation of business, media, civil society, and local government sectors. Maybe what is needed most in the future is the presence of individuals who work at national-level institutions so that these processes are also in contact with the national government’s plans. Our proposals as a group would face fewer hang-ups, because none of our proposals would have to be disentangled from active national or local plans. That’s why it is important for the Binational Dialogue Group to include people who work on the binational level or on the border. I also think it would be a shame to go without more direct representation of different organizations with experience working on the border so that the group’s proposals can be less general and more concrete. At the border, there are established organizations without their own voice. Maybe with representatives from both sides of the border, from strong and established organizations there, we can make even greater contributions.

Margarita Carranco is president of the Ecuadorian Association of Women in Municipal Government. She was a councilor and second vice president in the metropolitan district of Quito. She has a doctorate in education and is an expert on gender and the human rights of women. She has a master’s degree in political systems and legal reforms. She served as director of the Projects Unit for the Political Coordination of Ecuadorian Women.
Participating in the Binational Dialogue Group for almost eight months was an extremely gratifying experience. It was especially interesting to attend meetings in Colombia and Ecuador and to meet Ecuadorian officials in a different aspect—not as a journalist but as an individual open to hearing different perspectives before forming her own. I was also delighted to meet former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, who is one of my idols. When he was finishing the last part of his presidency of the United States, I was completing my doctorate there, in a Republican state. Because I had major expectations, I was very disappointed when he lost re-election. After all, he contributed to the process of Latin America changing from dictatorships to democratic governments. Since then, I have felt a special sense of gratitude toward him, and it was very emotional for me to have a chance to get to know a person of such special significance from my days as a university student. For that reason, I decided to write an article about President Carter for Vistazo magazine. I thought I was in a good position to raise the public’s awareness of what The Carter Center does and what it has been organizing in the Binational Dialogue Group to attempt to improve relations between Colombia and Ecuador.

The Binational Dialogue Group was composed of members from many different fields. As a result, we were able to examine relations between Ecuador and Colombia from almost every angle—not just from a political angle, which is what we journalists are normally concerned with, but also from a civil society angle and a border population angle. This experience equipped me with a wider perspective on the problem and allowed me to feel empathy; that is, I put myself in the other’s shoes and understood why, for Colombians—especially after what occurred in Angostura—the Ecuadorian position was so difficult to comprehend. At the same time, I think that for us as Ecuadorians, who felt offended, reaching this understanding was a major step forward, because when you understand the perspective of the other side, you can find things in common on which to move forward.

At the beginning, I thought that the Ecuador—Colombia issue was solely a problem of presidential personalities, but later I came to understand it as a much wider conflict. I also became aware of the lives of the people along the border whose lives seemed far removed from my own. I was not conscious of the problems those people have to deal with as a consequence of the disruption of diplomatic relations. At the same time, my contribution to the group was to spread the idea that there are many efforts under way in many areas, but if those efforts are not made visible to a public audience, they cannot become internalized by the people. My role then was to suggest to the other members that the press could be the mechanism for drawing attention to these activities. Although the publication of books about the issues tied to relations between Colombia and Ecuador is a fantastic initiative, at the end of the day, the information those books have to offer remains within a small circle of academics and intellectuals. It does not reach the masses, who are unaware of what is happening unless we make it visible through the mass media.

In dialogue processes, sometimes there is a lot of dialogue and not a lot of concrete results. In some ways, it would have been better if we could have come up with some more concrete steps. I think we put forth a great effort for the border projects, but in other areas, such as the meeting for business leaders or the meeting for journalists we wanted to promote, we fell short. In addition, I would have enjoyed seeing

When you understand the perspective of the other side, you can find things in common on which to move forward.
more of the other proposed projects by the Binational Dialogue Group reach a happy ending; precisely because there are still so many differences between the two countries, however, that didn’t happen. For example, I would have liked to see put into practice the idea for reporters from Ecuador and Colombia to visit both sides of the border to tell human stories and raise consciousness of these issues at the highest levels, so that decision-makers might reflect on how to resolve the termination of diplomatic relations.

Another initiative I participated in was attempting to establish a relationship between media outlets in Ecuador and Colombia that would publish collaborative works by Ecuadorian journalists in Colombian publications and vice versa. Unfortunately, due to the sensitivity of the situation and the tense relationship that exists between the government and the press in Ecuador, in Ecuador we could not find the same openness to Colombian voices as we found in Colombia for Ecuadorian voices.

The first surprise for me with respect to the topic of Ecuador–Colombia relations was a meeting between media directors and editors from Colombia and Ecuador in which I participated in June 2008. There, among all the participants, we realized that we had certain mirror-image perceptions, in the sense that the Ecuadorians thought that the Colombians didn’t understand us and vice versa. Thanks to this initiative, we became open to the knowledge that there were other perspectives. I also felt that Colombia has always treated Ecuador as its little brother. Both through this initiative with media directors and editors and through the Binational Dialogue Group, the Colombians came to understand this feeling as well as the need to stop treating Ecuadorians like younger brothers. At the same time, we as Ecuadorians came to understand how difficult the problem of violence is in Colombia. This mutual understanding was a major advance, because from now on—at least in all of my work—I will always have this wider perspective in mind instead of a one-sided national perspective.

Maybe the future of the Binational Dialogue Group will require new blood and new ideas but have the same basic principles. Maybe it should retain the individuals who have been the most active so that it doesn’t turn into two totally different groups. At the same time, new people should be incorporated to bring new life to the group and to allow this dialogue practice to influence wider and wider spheres of action.

Finally, for me the group’s most important contribution was to raise a warning flag signifying that society believes in dialogue, that civil society is aware these two neighboring countries, with their long common history and so many serious shared problems along their common border, need every element at their disposal to overcome their troubles and find resolution. It has been like a banner that tells our governments, “Try to solve this problem because the people who are being affected are the peoples along the border!”

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PEDRO VELASCO

THE HEIRS OF THE PASTO NATION

It was deeply satisfying to be included as part of the Binational Dialogue Group. I have so many reasons. This border region, despite good neighborly relationships and a sense of brotherhood maintained for centuries, has been excluded from development processes at the national and international level. We have an opportunity to learn about the history of border regions in Latin America and around the world, their successful practices, threats they encountered, and the visions they can bring to life, thus capitalizing on the strengths and protecting against the weaknesses in each situation. We have the opportunity to establish new friendships and important contacts with representatives of various institutions and countries around the world and to learn about processes that have been implemented along other borders.

The Binational Dialogue Group organized by The Carter Center gave us a forum to clarify, propose, and imagine solutions that would improve the daily lives of our citizens and preserve peace and friendship between the people along the border. Based on the foundation of the activities and analyses conducted by experts and other actors native to those zones, we can make more efficient economic, technical, cultural, and social investments to help achieve greater results and benefits for the population, within parameters that prioritize the practice of full democracy and full respect for the human being. For this effort to continue on its own, we need a better communication dynamic and a more active presence by its members and organizers.

This window of opportunity has enabled us to bring to light the reality of our municipalities in the north of Ecuador and the south of Colombia—our daily experiences, and the roots from which we have grown, originating from the Pasto nation that lived on this land, converted into a single family with strong ties of kinship and blood relationship that made us indivisible. It has allowed us to reveal the Ipiales and Tulcán identities to the world as peoples who are strong, honest, hard-working, loyal, and tolerant. It allowed us to show how we have passed through history as brother peoples, how we have practiced mutual collaboration; how we have integrated and exchanged our cultural, technical, and administrative experiences; what projects we have completed together; what basic human services works we have shared; and how we have managed to resolve our common problems and meet our common needs. I was definitively able to bring to light the singularity of the inhabitants of the Andean border between Ecuador and Colombia and of their initiatives for moving forward and continuing to improve and transform this binational border.

Frequent meetings, annual operating plans, technical assistance, internships for municipal officials and professionals, suitability of the planned agenda, autonomy in the execution stage, active participation from local actors—all of these are essential tools suited to streamlining the process. Once the binational dialogue groups have been revitalized, they should be empowered by the population, because we all have a responsibility to be part of the solution instead of the problem, in a collaborative effort involving local, national, and international institutions, such as The Carter Center. Our people will be the ones responsible for (and the protagonists of) whatever happens in our environment, that binational strip of land in which we fight for a better world. We are good neighbors, and we are proud to call it home.

I have personally looked on with optimism at the commitment of these citizens with such great under-
standing of the Ecuadorian–Colombian and Latin American reality. Their objective has been to contribute ideas and actions to identify and apply practical solutions that encourage positive improvement in relations between these two Latin American countries, with other continents, and especially with our neighbors. The challenge is to transform these borders into bonds of unity, bridges of friendliness, and dry ports through which friendly hands and hearts can pass.

I hope that the Binational Dialogue Group will make a thorough technical assessment, completing concrete projects of many varieties that it designs and manages, pursuing an objective that will bring us closer to a vision we have imagined in our strategic development plans. Doing so will contribute to making this Ecuadorian–Colombian border a zone of peace, joy, convergence, and progress and to achieving the full satisfaction of living in liberty, equality, and social justice.

Pedro Velasco is an attorney and has a doctorate in jurisprudence. As of 2000 he has served as the mayor of the canton of Tulcán. Has been the secretary-general and director of procurement for the Carchi Provincial Council. He has also served in honorary posts such as representative of the Carchi Electoral Tribunal, president of the Carchi Law School, and the representative of the municipalities on the director’s board of the National Bank, among others.
Ricardo Ávila
A Highly Effective Informal Network

The Binational Dialogue Group played an important role in helping to knock down many of the myths and false beliefs we had. It allowed us to gain knowledge on the subject of relations between Colombia and Ecuador, a subject that we all believed we knew well but about which we actually knew very little. I believe we came out better informed and more aware of our own ignorance than before. It is a shame that we never made it to the border. I would have liked to see something about the land. As I see it, the most useful moments of the binational dialogue initiative were the moments in which we discussed concrete issues, whether it was because of the presence of an external speaker or because one of the group members, with expertise on a particular subject, took a moment to share specialized knowledge. These kinds of speeches provided the other members, especially the members from the other country, with a new perspective on the circumstances particular to Colombia or to Ecuador. It was very useful.

I also found very interesting the way this process was able to repair the mutual lack of trust between these two countries. Even though the reality of the conflict between Colombia and Ecuador was much worse than what anyone had expected, the Binational Dialogue Group was not broken and in fact had even greater cohesion than anyone had hoped. That proved to be a very important test.

My experience as a member of the Binational Dialogue Group made me more aware of the situation of Colombian refugees and also made me realize everything that Ecuador has done to try to attend to them. It also helped me understand the nuances there can be within a government and to move past the habit of generalizing, which is so easy to do about government positions. Another important element has been the establishment of contacts. This process is fundamental to developing a network that, despite its informal nature, can play an important part in keeping the binational dialogue alive.

For my part, I believe that practicing journalism has taught me to be pragmatic and helped me try to discourage the tendency—which sometimes takes hold in this kind of group—of talking and talking without reaching any concrete results. Time gets away from you in conversation if you don’t make an effort to be precise and to speak in practical terms. I believe I helped guide the discussions in a more concrete direction. As a journalist, I also knew a lot of information, but overall the most important thing was the richness of the varied contributions offered by the combination of people who formed the Binational Dialogue Group. The group included people with different professional opinions. The saving grace was that the sum was so much greater than its parts.

As a journalist, I have been able to contribute to the editorials on Ecuador in El Tiempo for more than a year and a half. The knowledge I acquired as a result of participating in the Binational Dialogue Group helped prepare me to write about relations between these two countries and to contribute to establishing the editorial position on the subject for the largest publication in Colombia. Thanks to this, the editorials we published reflect far more layered opinions than they would have if I hadn’t been exposed to this knowledge. In addition to that, I wrote an article about Colombia and Ecuador for the Ecuadorian magazine Criterios, and I secured column space in El Tiempo for Ecuadorian columnists. Unfortunately we couldn’t take advantage of that space because we couldn’t get organized. The idea was for someone in Ecuador to take charge of coordinating and delivering the articles by the Ecuadorian columnists, but the work never materialized. The offer of space has not expired; we just need to find a way to get organized and secure columns.

Processes like this one have their own dynamic. The Binational Dialogue Group acquired a personality all its own and functioned well. Looking back, I suppose there was more rotation among the Ecuadorian members than the Colombian members. Although such shifts were impossible to predict when the group was formed, I would have liked to see a lit-
tle more stability in this sense. All in all, the exercise was very productive, however.

Now the Binational Dialogue Group has reached a point where it needs to end. The members of the group have to conclude their work with a sense of satisfaction and pride for what they have done. The process itself should continue with new people, however. It is also important to share this experience because it provides such an interesting model. I hope it could even be replicated in other countries and regions, adapted to their own particular characteristics! The objectives of the first phase of work for the Binational Dialogue Group have been achieved. Now I think the best thing would be for the process to continue with different participants who are replaced at certain intervals. These processes earn credibility from the fact that they have a beginning and end. It wouldn’t be good for a group of the same people to persist over an extended period of time: It is essential to open the circle. Right now we are about 10 Colombians and 10 Ecuadorians who have learned so much more about our own countries as well as our neighbor, but the ideal scenario is for this group to continue expanding with new members who know more about other aspects of each side.

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Putting Yourself in the Other's Shoes

The binational dialogue process in which we participated didn’t just yield practical results; it also brought mutual enrichment to all of the members of the Binational Dialogue Group and a new background of experiences and knowledge to our daily lives. It allowed us to gain new opinions and knowledge that can be useful for other dialogue processes as well as in each of our distinct professional fields. It was an opportunity for me to share a dialogue forum with important figures from Ecuador and Colombia. While I had previously known some of the Ecuadorian members and Luis Carlos Villegas of Colombia, it was an enriching experience getting to know the other members from both countries.

We were called on to participate in a binational dialogue process to attempt to strengthen relations between Ecuador and Colombia at a time when the countries still maintained formal diplomatic relations between them. When they ask me to participate in an initiative, I accept if I think I can add something of value; at the same time, I hope that accepting will allow me to grow and learn new ways of thinking about and seeing things. In this case, I feel very satisfied because my participation in the Binational Dialogue Group exposed me to — and opened my mind to — other points of view than the perspective I had as a citizen of Ecuador. I learned to really see the position of Colombia and to understand why and possibly how we could try to reach an agreement that would help improve relations between these two countries and re-establish their formal diplomatic relations.

I am happy to say that I formed friendships with all of the members of the group, and I feel that our efforts were worth it. I believe that, at their core, our efforts helped bring our two countries closer on many levels. The fundamental reason for our work was never the re-establishment of diplomatic relations, even though what we did may have contributed to creating a better environment for that re-establishment. At certain times, the purpose of the Binational Dialogue Group was misunderstood; the Ecuadorian members faced questions about what they were doing, specifically on one of the Ecuadorian president’s weekly Saturday radio broadcasts. Our purpose was always to help strengthen relations between Ecuador and Colombia; we started our labor before the termination of diplomatic relations, and we had no pretense of mediating.

Having the opportunity to speak with both presidents allowed us to deliver messages from a civil society standpoint. I think that the presidents took those messages into account and, in one way or another, helped discourage further escalation of the antagonism between the two governments. It does not frustrate me that diplomatic relations have not been re-established, because the issue is an extremely serious one for both parties. Each country has positions that need to be respected. The process of the Binational Dialogue Group taught us to put ourselves in the shoes of other people and understand their way of thinking and the reasons they have for accepting or not accepting a situation. This understanding worked to bring our positions closer. If we compare the first and the last meetings that we held with the entire group, there was a change in mentality and much less distance between our positions.

In the first meetings, you would have thought we would never be able to put ourselves in the other’s shoes, but time passed and we realized it wasn’t so difficult. There were very open-minded people who were committed to the dialogue. The support of The Carter Center and the UNDP was also essential. They were permanent guides that helped orient the dialogue process. Thanks to them, the Binational Dialogue Group was able to keep working past the original date that its members had committed to and even beyond the second phase that was planned, which shows the commitment felt by the members to make sure the dialogue process isn’t cut off. I don’t believe that any of this would have been possible without the support of The Carter Center and the UNDP. I hope that both organizations will continue to support the group,
at least until the re-establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

For a dialogue process like this to yield results, each of the participants must have different or particular views on what is happening within his or her country and outside it. In this sense, I noticed that within the group, none of the Ecuadorian members started out with any views on foreign trade or investments from a business perspective. Thus, I felt I would be able to contribute to the group in that area. I could spread these views and attempt to strengthen the commercial and investment relations between our countries or at least to discourage any further deterioration from the run-ins that occurred at the beginning with these governments, which is unfortunately exactly what happened after the events on March 1, 2008. In summary, I decided to participate in the Binational Dialogue Group because I knew that I could contribute a perspective different from the rest of the group and, at the same time, could be personally enriched by their different perspectives. Learning about the variety of perspectives wasn’t important only for my participation in the group; it was also part of my job as the executive director of the Corporation for Promoting Exports and Investments, because it falls on me to lobby at the government level, business level, international level, etc. This experience was truly valuable both personally and professionally.

As far as my contributions to the Binational Dialogue Group, I participated in two specific initiatives related to the business aspect. In June 2008, the Colombo–Ecuadorian Chamber of Industry and Commerce invited me and some other group members to participate in a forum on the future of the commercial relationships between the two countries. This forum was not limited to participants who were well versed in the business side of it and included some group members who had a more political perspective on the matter and/or were there to comment. Later, toward the end of 2008, the group secured support from The Carter Center and the CAF to organize a process of developing agreements between business actors from both countries. This initiative never came to fruition because we realized that it was going to take place at the wrong time. The idea is still there, however, and the initiative could be reactivated whenever it seems appropriate.

Meanwhile, I also took advantage of the close relationships I have with a few members of the Ecuadorian government to let them know about what the Binational Dialogue Group was doing and to discuss with them the issues affecting the situation between Ecuador and Colombia. On some occasions, I spoke with the minister of foreign relations to touch on the subject of relations between Ecuador and Colombia and see how they might be improved. I also tried to increase the openness of the Ecuadorian government to this issue and to engage in dialogue with the group. I did the same thing with the general secretary of public administration and communication and other ministers with whom I had contact. I kept them up to date with what the Binational Dialogue Group was doing and asked that they find some way or another to share this information with the president. I couldn’t really say what the results of those conversations were, but I suppose that the more people in the circles of the president and the minister of foreign relations who have talked to them about the subject, the better the chances we would have of softening the position of the Ecuadorian government and of leading it to a better understanding of the Colombian government’s position and eventual reconciliation.

Another important initiative I participated in with members of the Binational Dialogue Group was collecting signatures for a letter petitioning both presidents to open up to reconciliation. This was not an easy feat. After receiving some signals indicating that this communication would not be frowned upon by the two presidents, we decided to submit the letter to them in early June 2008. The signatories included the members of the group and other influential people from both countries. This initiative reflected a legitimate interest on the part of Ecuadorian and Colombian civil society to protect each country’s best interests and express their concern over the situation between the two countries. It was a sensible and
respectful request. I think the initiative should have been taken seriously by both presidents.

There have been other important initiatives related to border integration and the events that have been organized along the border. Although I did not directly participate in these initiatives, I think that they were extremely valuable. From a practical standpoint, they may have been the most important activities of the whole exercise. The academic conferences have also been valuable because they provided a forum for exchanging information.

Overall, I took part in all of the discussions that occurred within the group, and I never held back when I felt that I needed to contribute something. I contributed my own perspective, while always respecting the ways of thinking of the other members. The Ecuadorian members did not always share the same positions. Although I tried to participate in all meetings of the Binational Dialogue Group, including the national and binational ones, it is unfortunate that I had to miss some of them because I was out of the country or had meetings with the government that I couldn’t postpone. I wish that I had been able to dedicate as much time to this process as I wanted to. If I had been able to participate in all of the meetings, maybe I could have contributed a little more to the process. It is important to keep in mind how our schedules affect these kinds of processes. There will always be times when not everyone can be present because of other obligations that can’t be postponed. The important thing is to always reach the minimum critical mass.

The efforts of the Binational Dialogue Group with the participation of President Carter — although from a distance — have merit and will be justified at least until the point when Ecuador and Colombia re-establish diplomatic relations. Once their diplomatic relations are restored, it will be easier to find the appropriate channels for any problems.
doesn’t mean that the group couldn’t continue working, but its focus would need to change after the restoration of diplomatic relations. I believe it is important for The Carter Center to stay involved at least until negotiations resume. If there are financing problems preventing the group from continuing to operate with the support of The Carter Center, we will see what we can do to secure funding. We could meet less frequently and use technology to do more things online. While we should continue to meet a certain number of times per year during the second phase, we could also maintain a dialogue through the Internet and videoconferencing. As I see it, it is important for the initiative to continue with the support of The Carter Center because it offers so much added value. As long as we continue as a group, we will always maintain this dialogue, and our governments will always be aware of the existence of this binational group that remains committed to improving relations between these two countries and bringing their peoples closer together.

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Beyond the Government’s Vision

As a member of the Binational Dialogue Group, my greatest satisfaction has been to have an open dialogue with people who share good judgment and analytical abilities for evaluating situations, as well as to receive new information. This effort was a very constructive one, both within the set of Colombian members and the Binational Dialogue Group as a whole. We addressed many pressing issues affecting bilateral relations between Colombia and Ecuador. This exercise could even be replicated in other bilateral situations. On a personal level, the initiative gave me a chance to compare views with people of different ideological leanings from Ecuador and Colombia and of different professional experiences and fields. This experience was very enriching because it stimulated the inclusion of new elements in our analysis that expanded our knowledge and encouraged us to interact much more comfortably.

I imagine that the group’s contributions were useful for tackling the tough issues affecting relations between Colombia and Ecuador. Through the group, we found a mechanism for understanding and developed a complete methodology. We also demonstrated that it was possible to conduct a constructive dialogue and formulate a common agenda. This was made clear not only by the methodology but also by the attitude of the members of the Binational Dialogue Group. At a time when the re-establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries is so urgent, we at least made advances in terms of dialogue and understanding. This experience generated many more elements to work on.

I have worked in the Colombian government for years. I have worked closely with and agreed with many of the programs and policies of President Uribe’s government. My participation in the group was objective, however. My principal interest was in contributing to the group and sharing the particular information I had, such as the programs for fighting illegal crops, for which it was my responsibility to develop alternative methods to replace the illegal crops. I did so without the passion or the formal role of defending the Colombian government, because I understood that this was not the role that I should play. The objective of our participation in the Binational Dialogue Group was not to debate for or against the governments and wind up with polarization but rather was to build up dialogue and understanding. I believe that this was my approach for the entire time, and I hope that I contributed something in that sense.

Being in the private sector, I had fewer opportunities to get involved in specific projects targeted toward improving relations between Colombia and Ecuador. I participated in some concrete activities, however, such as the binational forum for Colombo–Ecuadorian women that was organized by the Women’s Foundation of Colombia. I participated as a panelist in the forum. It was a very interesting initiative in which businesswomen from both countries shared their experiences and analysis. I also had a few conversations with both of the foreign ministers and even with President Uribe about the importance of supporting initiatives such as the Binational Dialogue Group. These activities were the ones I was most involved in. At the same time, my companions took part in other activities. Some of them, for example, used their influence on public opinion by publishing articles or columns—especially the journalists in the group or the members involved in academic studies. My professional activities kept me from participating in this way, but I was able to get involved in the other activities that I just described.
Being able to converse with the foreign policy decision-makers was a great thing. I kept them informed of the role of the Binational Dialogue Group and our vision. We also had meetings with both presidents, which was very satisfying. We took those opportunities to explain the potential and limits of the Binational Dialogue Group to both governments. I believe the group can make clear contributions to improving relations between the two countries. It could have had more relevance in public, however, by adopting a constructive, objective posture of raising interest and making contributions. It could have called more attention to the positive aspects of bilateral relations rather than keeping such a low profile.

I think that the process was well-thought-out and well-executed. The methodologies we used were well-suited, as was the time management, which let us process information. If anything could have been improved, I would definitely emphasize the need to focus more on public opinion and have more visibility. This is something that should be reconsidered and analyzed. I believe that we were overly cautious with the group’s image. I think it could have been useful for the Binational Dialogue Group to be visible in both countries, employing constructive and purposeful language and staying out of all of the fights and controversies. It could have served as a moderating force, calling for calmness, analysis, meetings, and the path of diplomacy for resolving problems. I believe there is a lesson there for future opportunities.

As far as the configuration of the group and the selection of its members, I think they were well-done. The participants are people with different political ideologies and inclinations who have been involved in a wide range of activities. All of us have served as leaders in our countries over processes in distinct fields, including politics, journalism, and business. So, the group members are people who will continue to have relevance to the public sphere in both countries. In this sense, the members of the group will always serve as a resource that can be tapped at the right time and rearticulated, because they shared a common experience and a path to understanding. I think that the Binational Dialogue Group should continue to meet, but it should be more involved in specific projects, especially ones in the border zone. The group is undeniably a resource for the governments of both countries—not just for ways to bring Colombia and Ecuador closer together but also for other processes. The members of the Binational Dialogue Group constitute a team of committed and interested people with many complementary strengths and different perspectives. The group is a very important resource that will be relevant in the future.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude for the interest, commitment, and masterly organization of The Carter Center and the United Nations in this process. I think it was so important for organizations such as The Carter Center and the United Nations to have so much interest and willingness to keep this process moving forward. Their facilitation was extremely professional, and the entire team offered great analysis and effort. This experience has been a process of enriching and sharpening all of the skills and capacities of the members of the Binational Dialogue Group, but it was also a great contribution that will last beyond the present moment and will persist through time.

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From its inception in late 2007, with the support of The Carter Center and the UNDP, the Binational Dialogue Group has been a plural forum that has involved citizens from both sides with a high level of influence in government or on public opinion, a certain perspective on the other country, and, above all, the disposition to commit to a dialogue. These founding characteristics have been present throughout the different stages that the BDG has passed through.

The first phase, from November 2007 to February 2008, was centered on the presentation of each national perspective that, despite the different nuances on each side, was fundamentally oriented toward explicitly stating the realities, perceptions, and needs of each side. The meeting in Atlanta in November 2007 was an inevitable and necessary “catharsis,” with the few attempts at connection mostly stimulated by the female members of the BDG, by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and his foundation’s staff, as well as by the UNDP. By the meeting in Quito in February 2008, we could explore a binational agenda full of initiatives designed to promote greater mutual understanding and positive ties between us.

The second phase was marked by the events of March 1, 2008, which, rather than precipitating a split, strengthened the BDG. At the meeting in Bogotá in April 2008, both sides made a significant effort to understand each other’s realities and national sensitivities as well as the updated role of the group in the new context created by the disruption of diplomatic relations. The meeting in Atlanta in May 2008, with the secretary-general of the OAS and President Carter, differentiated the good offices of those two figures from the role of the BDG. They analyzed the situation with us, and we established a plan of action for strengthening the positive ties between the two countries. This plan included initiatives such as exchanging lists of columnists with periodicals in both countries, organizing binational meetings between different sectors of the population along with academic forums, filming a binational documentary, etc. With this ambitious plan, we realized we would need to organize two additional rounds of dialogue, in Quito and Bogotá, to conclude the exercise.

As could be predicted, the question of normalizing diplomatic relations guided the BDG’s efforts, starting with the collection of signatures from both countries to petition the presidents to reinstate diplomatic relations. Members of the BDG also wrote proposals for small steps for the governments toward reconciliation. We went to meetings with President Uribe on June 25 and President Correa on June 26 with the objective of asking them to return to the agreements they made with President Carter to progressively reinstate formal relations. The national meetings with government ministers were held with the same purpose in mind.

Upon evaluating our work, the meetings in Quito and Bogotá demonstrate how, despite the fact that the established plan of action had not been fulfilled as planned (although not by way of negligence), the members of the BDG had successfully created dynamics in the planned spirit: supporting events for chambers of commerce, women, journalists, academics, and local border authorities and communities; and publishing hundreds of articles or interviews or opinion pieces in which the members of the BDG tried to expand and improve mutual understanding, emphasize the importance of dialogue, and highlight the many things our nations share in common as a starting point for evaluating our differences.

In summary, the BDG has completed a productive effort to influence society and public opinion in each country as well as the governments and members of the international community interested in the Colombo-Ecuadorian problem.
tive effort to influence society and public opinion in each country as well as the governments and members of the international community interested in the Colombo–Ecuadorian problem. It has helped to multiply the number of meetings between different sectors in both countries and the number of articles or programs in the mass media—all of which are directed toward improving mutual understanding and comprehension of the circumstances in each country and of binational relations. In addition, it attempted to offer proposals for the governments to help them normalize and strengthen our relations and to develop the border zones and surrounding areas. For me, this has also been a rich reunion with the Ecuadorian friends and colleagues with whom I had shared earlier activities and projects, which strengthened friendships and enriched my perspective on national and binational issues.

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Alfredo Negrete
An Effort Worth Continuing

I participated in the Binational Dialogue Group only during its first meetings: the binational meeting in Atlanta, the preparatory meetings in Quito, and finally the binational meeting in Quito. After that, I had to separate from the group. Despite not being able to continue with the initiative, it struck me as a truly extraordinary experience. The binational meeting in Atlanta, which was attended by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, was complex and difficult. It was all worthwhile, however. The Carter Center provided us with tools for dialogue, negotiation, and finding common ground. Unlike what usually happens with a country’s internal policies, in the realm of international relations, it’s not just the results that count but also your methods and your peaceful approach. In this case, one of the most outstanding achievements is that, thanks to this effort, we Ecuadorians got to know the Colombians and the Colombians got to know us. We discovered that we had disagreements and prejudices, but we also found that we could agree on some of the many points we had in common. If only this conduct by the members of the Binational Dialogue Group could be transferred into the official government realm!

When I joined the group, I thought that I knew a lot because I had worked in the Ecuadorian press, as well as with the Peruvian press, in the negotiations during and after the conflict between Ecuador and Peru. I learned many new things, however. I discovered that, at least on the part of Ecuadorians, we should have known much more about Colombia. We did not understand the diversity, intensity, and complexity of Colombia’s painful history, because we were used to focusing on the headlines from the international news or on official public statements rather than the experiences of the people most affected. I am talking about the people who live in the border zone, about academic groups, etc. My impression is that my experience as a member of the Binational Dialogue Group was shared by many others, who probably learned much more as the process continued. I would say that The Carter Center, living up to its widely respected reputation, organized an enormously valuable experience. We discovered that the people of two countries can come together among themselves. With Peru, our differences were historical, legal, and territorial. This is a problem of political perceptions and of the lack of tolerance that characterizes governments in Latin America in general.

In the Binational Dialogue Group, we had great discipline, which is essential for international negotiations. The exchange could be frank and tense, but in a productive way. I have heard many other members describe the experience of the Atlanta meeting as a catharsis: We purged. This was important because it established a foundation for the binational meeting in Quito. In this second meeting, we made a great deal of progress because we grasped that—beyond the most serious problem, violence—the problems between Ecuador and Colombia were caused by diverse and unrelated causes. We did not appreciate the coexistence that goes on in the border communities that are not divided by a line. They share the same environment and the same rivers; they have the same needs and suffer from the same dangers. I also think that, in addition to trying to normalize diplomatic relations between these two states, the governments should also be made aware that there are many more things we can do that have not been done yet, that there are efforts being made in different places, and that this should be remedied sooner rather than later, regardless of the political problems between the two governments.
All of the countries in Latin America, including our own, as Colombia’s historical neighbor and brother, want to see peace in that country. Its people have suffered enough, have bled enough. We should already be planning for the future. Because someday peace will happen, because peace is part of the rationality of human communities, and we have to ask what will happen when we demilitarize the generations that have been born amid guns and continue to live with guns, to use guns? Many Colombians have lived through violence since their adolescence or childhood. When peace comes, these people will have to adjust to a new living environment, and both Ecuador and Colombia should think about what will happen when we try to reintegrate between 10,000 and 15,000 Colombians who have been living nothing but violence.

We must continue this binational dialogue exercise that has been led by The Carter Center. Although it has been many months since I left the group, I have closely followed it, and I believe it should go on. We need to take advantage of the resource we have in the participation of an international figure of President Carter’s stature. He was only recently in Ecuador, and he showed himself to be a man who is political, peaceful, fair, and has great international vision.

My experience as a member of the Binational Dialogue Group allowed me to share ideas with the newspaper where I have worked for eight years, El Comercio. Along with another member of the group, Gonzalo Ruiz—who is also on the editorial board at El Comercio—I promoted an editorial debate. I believe that the dialogues we had within the editorial board and with the other directors in that medium have helped bring a little change to the dynamics of the topic and have removed it from the purely political environment in which it was framed and from which it was never going to escape.

There should be a binational or international effort to provide support to the border zones that are endangered on both sides. Without it, we will be facilitating more violence. The Ecuadorian and Colombian peoples have just begun to understand each other: We didn’t have a plan for binational integration’s stages, chronology, well-established time lines, or international assistance, which must be precise, concrete, and nonbureaucratic. Our binational working agendas with Colombia should be intense, despite whatever differences may exist between our governments. The Carter Center is in the right position to help support the resolution of the problems between Ecuador and Colombia and to achieve binational integration for these two peoples, who have everything in common.

The media has not been able to duplicate what it learned from a conflict that was even more complex than the current one with Colombia: the case of our conflict with Peru. In that situation, the media on both sides reached a deeper understanding of each country, respecting one another’s values and laying the groundwork for the strong relationships that still exist. This has not happened with the Colombian media. I believe that relations between the Ecuadorian and Colombian journalists have been concentrated between Quito and Bogotá rather than encompassing the diversity of the media in each country. My impression is that the journalists are afraid of no common ground and there is not enough political dialogue in either country. Maybe the media are always limited in what they can do because their positions cannot go past the dictates of national security measures.

A major setback for this process was what transpired with the bombing of Angostura. This incident unleashed a political chain reaction between the two countries, but at the same time, it forced different social actors to recognize Colombia in a different way and to realize that Colombia’s territory does not end in Bogotá, just like Ecuador’s territory doesn’t end in Quito. Add to this all of the problems that have come up afterward—complex political problems for each of these countries—and the consequences of the global economic crisis with its potential effects on society.

The people of Colombia and Ecuador should draw their own conclusions about these events. The recent events in the Peruvian Andes, with more than 40 victims of the violence between indigenous communities and Peru’s armed forces, demand our attention because there are so many common characteristics.
among the Andean peoples; we have the same idiosyncrasies, and we tend to respond to the same cultural shifts. The Andean countries should be in the best position to truly and effectively mend their past wounds for the good of their peoples.

It concerns me that The Carter Center has been mostly on its own in this initiative, despite the support and cooperation it received from the United Nations. The international and regional communities should support this effort to improve its effectiveness and soften these harsh political stances. What The Carter Center organized was not just an exercise of good will — it was much more: It was an experience that should serve as a model for dialogue, understanding, honesty, and transparency in Latin America.

Through the Binational Dialogue Group, The Carter Center has a clear agenda for promoting binational integration. At the same time, it can capitalize on its international prestige as a second tactic for encouraging Ecuador and Colombia to change their positions and begin to reconcile with the objective of restoring different levels of diplomatic relations. These kinds of relationships cannot be re-established overnight. It is a slower process. I believe that this is the right path to it. Before we can begin to build binational scenarios that bestow peace and well-being for all, we first need to return to normal.

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The Group’s Role Is Not to Mediate

My experience as a member of the Ecuador–Colombia Binational Dialogue Group surpassed my initial expectations. At the beginning, I did not believe that the group would be relevant or capable of influencing anything or would even come together, but what happened demonstrated the opposite. During the first binational meeting we had a catharsis. As Colombians and Ecuadorians, we spoke our minds and our hearts. Once that had passed, the relationships between the members of the group started to relax more and more. We began to understand and grasp why the people of Colombia and Ecuador had seen the same situation in different ways: what unites us and what divides us. This exercise caused me to experience an interesting sense of personal growth that allowed me to better understand the problems in our relationship and their sources. At the same time, this experience served me well from a professional standpoint. When I joined the group, I worked in the Ministry of Government; later I moved on to the Ministry for Coordinating Internal and External Security. In both cases I was able to bring my experience and the lessons I took away to each level of government to which I had access and offered some suggestions on how we might, eventually, improve our relations with Colombia (once they have come to understand our own position, of course).

The first things that come to mind in terms of what I took away from the experience are related to human and personal relationships. On an interpersonal level, I established strong friendships with the other Ecuadorian members—some of whom I had known previously but not necessarily on a close personal level—and with the Colombian members, none of whom I had met until joining the group. All of the members have admirable personal qualities and diverse life experiences; we were able to establish a wonderful dynamic. As an individual, I found it deeply satisfying to share my own perceptions and understanding of relations between Ecuador and Colombia.

Another gift from the experience was my understanding of the Colombian perspective, which is clearly different from the Ecuadorian view. This knowledge allowed me to better understand how our binational problems might be resolved and how we can approach them together. Once we understand the root problem, we can begin to make plans about the future.

Drawing on past experiences and wisdom, every member contributed something to the Binational Dialogue Group. I was able to offer my opinion on its own merits, clarifying that it was neither an official opinion nor a representation of the position of the Ecuadorian government. I was also able to share information about some of the events and situations that we discussed. Based on my experiences, job, and training, I offered opinions that were sometimes supported by others and sometimes not. The debate of ideas and exchange of opinions in the Binational Dialogue Group were truly enriching. At the same time, I had a hand in these initiatives that led to a fuller understanding of the facts of the situation. In Ecuador and Colombia, the foreign policy decisions lie in the hands of the president of the republic, who manages his foreign policy through his foreign minister and different official institutions. I believe that on some occasions, I helped promote some initiatives simply by offering my opinion, however. In the Ministry for Coordinating Internal and External Security, I was responsible for coordinating advisers and directed the ministry’s involvement in the Ecuador–Colombia relationship. Unlike the Ministry of Foreign Relations, the Ministry for Coordinating Internal and External Security only provides counsel specific to the relationship between Ecuador and Colombia. My experience as a member of the Binational Dialogue Group was very useful in government settings—with the minister, in the ministry department, and in Cabinet security meetings. Although I couldn’t always achieve what I proposed, especially when the necessary conditions were not in place on either side, I was able to offer suggestions on how to improve relations between both countries.
Overall, the binational dialogue experience was highly valuable, but we made the mistake of seeing ourselves as mediators of the conflict between Ecuador and Colombia. If nothing else, we sent this impression at the wrong time. While the group has now absorbed this lesson and understands that it needs to avoid this impression of playing a mediator’s role, it does have significant potential as a facilitator. In the different fields in which they are engaged, the group members can have a direct or indirect influence on the relationship between these two countries to bring them closer or at the very least to discourage any further deterioration.

Until diplomatic relations are re-established between the two countries, the group can help by maintaining the flexibility of other relationships, on the civil society level or between local governments. It can promote initiatives such as the academic conferences or forums for local governments from both countries like the ones the group organized. These initiatives make an impact in the sense that they support greater understanding between both countries.

I believe that we should promote understanding among Colombians of why Ecuador’s perspective is what it is and also among Ecuadorians of why Colombia sees things as it does. That is the path to a middle ground where our different perspectives can come together.

I would like to see the Binational Dialogue Group help facilitate the Latin American and South American integration we want so dearly. One of the greatest obstacles to Latin American integration right now is the lack of formal diplomatic relations between Ecuador and Colombia. Until these relations are restored, South American integration will be very difficult and will take much longer. Given the Binational Dialogue Group’s areas of influence—through different editorials, press releases, articles, television programs, forums, and seminars in different cities in Ecuador and Colombia—it can play an important role in bringing countries closer together and promoting greater integration.

I believe that the Binational Dialogue Group should continue its efforts but not necessarily with the same members. Someone within the group suggested that we could involve other actors in the future. It strikes me as a wonderful idea that at the moment, there are between 10 and 12 of us on each side but one day there could be 200 of us. Of course this would require resources, support, etc., but we have to think ambitiously. I believe that the more people who can participate in this type of experience, the more valuable it becomes.

I hope funding exists so that the group, with the support of The Carter Center and other institutions such as the United Nations, can continue to work toward its initiatives that have proven so valuable for me as a person, as a professional, and for my country. I think that just before the end of its first phase, the group got the presidents of the two countries to understand its purpose. That is vital. It is an accomplishment that could be wasted if the group disappears, and it is an accomplishment that could be built upon by the next group that receives a favorable reaction from both governments.

In conclusion, I would say that these types of initiatives should continue, and I thank President Carter, The Carter Center, the United Nations, and all of the people who made this initiative possible.

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Galo Mora
Socializing Through Art and Culture

When I participated in the Binational Dialogue Group, the first thing that affected me was the growing, supportive, and brotherly interest of former U.S. President Jimmy Carter in getting involved with an issue that in theory should have been far removed from his peaceful situation. His decision to look beyond his peaceful life, to get involved in complex and serious conflicts—like the Colombian armed conflict that led to the violation of Ecuadorian sovereignty on March 1, 2008—deserves recognition from everyone. President Carter’s dedication to democracy is what brought us to this binational dialogue initiative. So, the first recognition I want to offer, beyond anything about the relationship between Ecuador—Colombia, is to President Carter and The Carter Center.

I believe that this experience of the Binational Dialogue Group has brought us many lessons. In the first meeting that took place in Atlanta, we encountered intense contradictions between the members from the two countries. After two or three days in the meeting, however, we also discovered hidden friendships and affinities that were deeply human. For example, I discovered a great deal of literary talent among different Colombian members. I also think that this initiative has contributed to strengthening the image of Latin American brotherhood that has been at the breaking point on several occasions. Another lesson I took from this dialogue was the need to avoid wars that are absurd, anachronistic for the 21st century, and that pit brother against brother. Overall, I would highlight three points to summarize this experience: first, my admiration for President Carter; second, the achievement of finding great affinity and empathy between the Ecuadorian members and the Colombian members of the group; and third, the collective will of the group to avoid getting bogged down in differences and instead focusing on everything that unites us.

Unfortunately, the Binational Dialogue Group dealt with a difficult hand from reality. Neither The Carter Center nor the group members had the power to change the situation that came down on us. I believe that the group could not effect radical changes in the public’s perceptions because we were not in a position to manipulate the reality that surrounded us. All the same, in terms of initiative, I believe that the efforts put forth by the Binational Dialogue Group have been the most coherent possible. Instead of intensifying the confrontation, through this binational dialogue mechanism, we attempted to discuss our problems as a group and reach agreements between our country’s opinion-makers.

For me, this experience of a few months with the Binational Dialogue Group has had a profoundly human component. On a personal level, I felt a brotherhood within the group, and that is very important. We need to be supportive, not neglect Nariño and Espejo, and not forget two groups of people who are similar. We have to think about borders the way Neil Armstrong saw them from the moon in 1969: as if they don’t exist. Borders are an imposition of politics and geopolitics. At the same time, they are now irreversible in the majority of the world. One of my dear friends—a Jewish Austrian doctor who was exiled in 1936—used to tell me that “geography is more exact than history in defining borders.” It’s true. However, even if these physical borders have been long determined and will be difficult to modify with our political efforts today, the brotherhood between our peoples extends far beyond the lines of the border.

Unfortunately, because I was appointed minister of culture, I was able to participate in the Binational Dialogue Group only through Feb. 20, 2008. Upon becoming minister, I had to leave this forum of such creativity, reflection, and talent. As a result, I could be present in only the first meetings of the group. In those meetings, I proposed that art and culture provided mediums where we could find fundamental points of unity. I am not sure whether the group was able to pursue any initiatives in this area. From what I have learned in following the group’s activities, I have watched with great optimism as it coordinated
academic activities. It is always frustrating to have to leave a forum so rich in ideas and so crucial for peace.

When I joined the Binational Dialogue Group, I worked in the government but I did not represent the government, considering that on foreign relations, the only government representatives are the president and the foreign minister. What I contributed, then, was a better understanding of the effort put forth by The Carter Center. For example, in preparation for the most recent visit to Ecuador by President Carter, just as in preparation for the previous meeting between President Correa and the members of the Binational Dialogue Group, I was able to offer some information so that the government would have a better understanding of the nature of this supportive effort.

Right now, the major challenge is maintaining and legitimizing the binational dialogue forum as an environment for peace building. It is very important to permanently maintain this forum for meeting and reflection with the incorporation of other social, political, and academic actors from each country. They could expand the participation to other sectors, such as the border authorities and institutions with a specific stake in these zones. I am also convinced that we should not forget about art and culture as areas of common ground between the two countries.

Finally, I want to express my deep gratitude for this initiative promoted by President Carter and The Carter Center, because there are no secondary interests behind it; it is transparent and real, as the life of Jimmy Carter has been.

Galo Mora was private secretary for President of the Republic of Ecuador Rafael Correa. He served as the minister of culture (2008–2009), director of speeches, and a cultural adviser (2007–2008). He is a writer, composer, musician, and anthropologist.
Uribe in Montecristi

By Francisco Carrión Mena

Among all of the festivities happening in honor of the opening ceremonies of the Constituent Assembly in Montecristi, I believe there is one event that has not been fully recognized—except to comment that he did not wear the traditional regional sombrero or that he didn’t receive the proper standard of treatment: the presence of President Álvaro Uribe at the inaugural ceremony.

After extending invitations to all of the presidents in South America and much speculation over the attendance of some of them, particularly Hugo Chávez and Alan García, the only and probably least expected attendee was the president of Colombia.

Why do I say the least expected? Well, the tensions that have unfortunately been affecting the relations between Colombia and Ecuador for some time now are well known—especially over recent weeks, in light of some incidents at the border and the heated exchange of public statements by the countries’ ministers of Defense—due to the scant respect that Colombia traditionally pays its neighbor to the south and the known political differences between President Uribe and President Rafael Correa.

How should we interpret Uribe’s presence in Montecristi? We could speculate on various hypotheses, such as the idea that the eventual meeting with Chávez would have provided an opportunity to dialogue with the Venezuelan leader about the “impasse” produced between their governments as a result of his withdrawal from negotiating on behalf of the humanitarian exchange for the FARC’s hostages, but I prefer to concentrate on another idea that I see as more probable or is at least what I would like to believe: that the Colombian President wanted to offer a gesture of support to Ecuador by accompanying President Correa as he rolls out the first major political proposal of his administration.

It stands out that Uribe has come to Ecuador in the midst of this strained situation. Our country should appreciate this attitude and return it in some fashion to help restore the level of importance that should correspond to the relations between our two countries and is the level that their peoples, through civil society, insistently demand.

Without retreating from the firm positions Ecuador has in its divergences with Colombia, this gesture could encourage the recommitment to using direct dialogue for all of the issues on the agenda, including the most difficult ones, with frankness and pragmatism, to reach a solution or at least a path to one. I am not certain but I do hope that in Montecristi, despite the fact that it wasn’t the perfect moment for it, there was some exchange of ideas between the two presidents on how to clear the impasses between them. I also hope that Uribe’s symbolic visit will be followed by other demonstrations, next time more concrete, to address the legitimate complaints that Ecuador has been raising in the areas of reparations for the Ecuadorians affected by violence, aerial glyphosate fumigations, security at the border, and the respect for our sovereignty. All in the name of reclaiming the ideal path for essential normalization: direct dialogue.

— El Comercio, Quito, December 8, 2007
Mandatory Courtesy
Toward Colombia

By Alfredo Negrete

In these years since it initiated the economic military plan that it signed on to with the United States, we have learned a great deal about the Republic of Colombia, its inhabitants and its governments. Throughout this forced process we have had numerous disagreements and annoyances, such as the instances of glyphosate fumigations near our territory, the cost of our preventive military defense and — for reasons of humanitarian support — of providing for numerous groups of Colombian refugees and displaced persons.

We have also seen many positive things that demonstrate the intertwined lifestyles of the border communities, however, as well as a diplomatic agenda that is becoming reality, as we will see in the next meeting of the Binational Commission in April or the formal meeting between the foreign ministers of both countries on the Rumichaca Bridge in May. All of this is part of the strategy to form a Border Integration Zone under the auspices of the Andean Community, which is planning to implement a Binational Development Plan on both sides of the border.

In this context, we have passed through a chapter that has harmed the people and the government of Colombia, a chapter that we should try to put an end to in the interest of our positive and growing relationship. I’m referring to the practice of declaring that Ecuador shares a border not with the Colombian government but with the FARC, which clashes with our official position on the neighboring conflict. In essence, Ecuador has made it apparent in numerous different ways that its only negotiating partner is the Colombian government. At the same time, we have explicitly refrained from classifying the irregular group known as FARC as “belligerent,” which is instigating a cruel conflict with the government and the people in that country. Under these conditions, knowing that, according to the standards of political science, territory is a constitutive part of the state, as are the population, authority, and sovereignty, we cannot afford to commit this contradiction in our public statements.

Ecuador and Colombia have a long way to go, and although our many difficulties will not disappear, the intensity of our historical relationship should lead to a binational development process with mutual benefits.

—El Comercio, Quito, February 9, 2008
Correa Is Not Chávez’s Pawn

By Rafael Nieto Loaiza

Recent events have shown us just how many differences distinguish Hugo Chávez from Rafael Correa, despite the fact that they are in agreement on some issues. The left in Latin America is a varied group that includes devout democrats, pluralists, and fiscal conservatives, as well as sectarians, radicals, and those inclined to employ violence to achieve their ends. The same thing is true around here. If here we have Lucho and Angelino, then Lula is over there, all with the same background in labor unions, popular support, and commitment to democracy. If here we have Tabaré Vásquez, with a solid professional background and old ties to the Tupamaro guerillas, there we have Navarro Wolff. While Chile practices socialism and orthodox free market economics, we also have leftist economists with an impeccable command of their field, such as Kalmanovitz. And of course, if beyond our borders we recognize larger-than-life personalities like Daniel Ortega and Evo Morales with about as much sophistication as cavemen, we have our own versions here as well.

But back to my original point. I said that the executives of Ecuador and Venezuela are very different. And these differences, beyond their vastly different personal backgrounds—Correa has a pair of master’s degrees and a doctorate and speaks several languages; Chávez is a military golpista and is coarse, self-taught, and inclined toward using the language of violence—begin to show themselves in the two countries’ treatment of Colombia.

For example, when Chávez decides to serve as the foreign minister of the FARC, Correa, although he doesn’t call them terrorists, is unafraid to point out that many of their actions fit that bill and does not hesitate to “completely reject the acts they commit in Colombia.” While the lieutenant colonel urges them to cease acting belligerently, the Ecuadorian president explicitly states that they will never do so. While Chávez suggests the integration of military forces through ALBA, Ecuador responds that it would rather not embark on that adventure. It’s obvious that Quito is making a concerted, systematic effort to distinguish itself from Caracas.

Someone will tell me that, despite all this, Correa chimed in and echoed Chávez in stating that Ecuador’s northern border is with the FARC. It was an unacceptable flippancy, to be sure, first committed by Wellington Sandoval, his minister of Defense, but it was a reflection of the belief about our southern neighbors that is held in certain sectors of the government, that Colombia does not have a sufficient military presence at the border, rather than a direct attempt to offend us. Moreover, recent exchanges with high-level Ecuadorian officials lead me to believe that Correa does not realize the indignation these statements stir up for Colombians and that if he had been aware of that he would have refrained from making them.

This ignorance, which is frequently a result of the prejudices and stereotypes held by groups on the Latin American left toward the violence in Colombia as well as Uribe’s government, is ultimately more evidence that it is essential for us to roll out a strategy for promoting understanding with our neighbor to the south. In Quito they recognize how much Uribe himself has done, considering that he was the only head of state to attend the opening ceremonies of Ecuador’s constituent assembly and the personal call he made to Correa after his unfortunate statements on the border.

Why not encourage a major meeting between the presidents and their Cabinets, like the one held between Ecuador and Peru after their small border war, in which we resolve the bulk of our problems and decisively promote the positive agenda between us?
region. But our diplomacy cannot afford to rely solely on defense and sit around until there are fires to put out.

In this case, we need to rebuild the relationship between the two countries and work together proactively. The areas of conflict almost all boil down to matters of security. Some of them are relatively easy to resolve (we have almost double the active military personnel in the zone compared to Ecuador, and in Quito they do not realize it). And now that Bogotá has decided to strengthen the manual eradication program, it should be possible to reach a gentleman’s agreement to refrain from fumigating in the 10-km zone requested by our neighbors (Colombia can’t commit to this in writing, because that would imply that there are conditions in place outside of Colombia for advancing in the fight against criminal activity). Others, such as the stereotype of Colombians as criminals, will require the media to abandon its use of the caricature. Perhaps the most difficult issue will be Ecuador’s reluctance to participate in joint operations to address criminal activity along the border, even though the coordination route would open up some possibilities that have not been sufficiently explored.

To conclude, Correa is not Chávez’s pawn. Uribe knows this. Why not encourage a major meeting between the presidents and their Cabinets, like the one held between Ecuador and Peru after their small border war, in which we resolve the bulk of our problems and decisively promote the positive agenda between us?

— Semana magazine, February 16, 2008

**Our Relations with Colombia**

By Manuel Chiriboga Vega

Our relations with Colombia could be described as profoundly interrelated. Thousands of Colombian citizens live in our country, escaping the problems of insecurity or simply seeking alternative work opportunities. Many of them have become actively integrated in our families and neighborhoods; some of them have started prosperous businesses that provide work to many Ecuadorians; others are capable professionals, in fields from journalism to business management; a good number have joined groups and associations in civil society. There are also Ecuadorians on the other side of the border, as you see when you visit any artisan market in Colombia and encounter Otavaleño craftsmen offering their products. Ecuadorian investors have started ventures in metalworking or nutritional products. There is also an active exchange in education.

They also represent an important trade partner for Ecuador, actually the second most important, and we are the third most important for Colombia. Our exports in 2007 were on the order of 650 million dollars, and they sold us some 1.1 billion dollars in goods. The products we imported included chemical, paper, plastic, vehicular, and nutritional products. For our part we sold them nutritional products such as rice and corn, vehicles, footwear, tuna fish, and cookware, among others. These figures fail to encompass the entirety of the commercial activity that takes place at the border, with goods such as gasoline cylinders or agricultural products crossing under the radar, and little by little across the two senses of the border.

Despite all this, our political relations with Colombia over the past few years have been plagued with difficulties. In large part, this is because the Colombian government spent a long time committing abuses under the mantle of its fight against subversive activity: fumigations in the border zone that affected rural and indigenous Ecuadorians; Colombian mili-
tary actions that crossed over the border and caused deaths, injuries, and material damages; reduced support for our country’s efforts to take in Colombian refugees; or its military presence along the border. It’s also certain that for a long time Ecuador has been excessively condescending.

When the current government tried to address these things, proposing a relationship with Colombia based on mutual respect—with no fumigations, no military operations that cross the border or that require our involvement in Colombia’s internal conflict—it was very poorly received by our neighboring countrymen. But I think that the clear message that was sent by the president and other Ecuadorian diplomatic actors was overall understood by Colombia. There are a lot of positive signals in this sense: suspension of the fumigations along the border, President Uribe’s attendance at the inauguration of the constituent assembly, support for the UNHCR for its activities in Ecuador or the most recent public statements by the commanding officer of the Colombian Armed Forces, which recognized the effort put forth by Ecuador, in the aftermath of the death of two Ecuadorian soldiers in an explosion of military materials that were obviously from the northern side of the border.

Ecuador has also made some positive gestures, such as keeping its distance from the subject of the Venezuelan–Nicaraguan military agreement or its clear opposition to recognizing the FARC as a belligerent force. While recognizing the unavoidable differences that the two presidents will certainly face on many issues, however, we need their relationship to grow to a higher level. This should include their promotion of the Border Integration Zone as well as periodic meetings between their ministries on various subjects, while seeking a more balanced trade relationship and using greater care with their words. Saying that we share a border with the FARC irritates Colombia; aligning ourselves geopolitically undermines the country.

—El Universo, Quito, February 18, 2008

**The Border Will Be Threatened Again**

**Interview with Adrián Bonilla**

Quito and Bogotá have turned down the volume, but the root issues that divide them are not resolved, warns expert Adrián Bonilla. And he argues that the United States was the biggest loser because of its inability to exert an influence in the crisis.

Hugo Chávez, Álvaro Uribe and Rafael Correa shared a hug and declared the end of the crisis that held the region in suspense for all of last week. But despite their words of good will, the wounds are still very much open and we still don’t know what is likely to happen from here. Adrián Bonilla, an analyst and the director of FLACSO in Ecuador, spoke with Página 12 by phone and ruled that the United States was the biggest loser of the crisis. “All of the countries in the Rio Group acted deliberately to impede or limit its presence,” he explained.

**What did Friday’s agreement mean?**

– It meant that the crisis is over, but not the underlying conflict. Basically it ended the tension produced as a result of the Colombian attack on Ecuadorian territory, but it did not create any type of procedure, whether international or bilateral, that would ensure that the border will not be a threat on their respective security agendas. The international community has failed to produce any mechanism to ensure a solution if this situation presents itself again, and it is clear that this type of incident could be repeated at any time.

**How can the relationship with Colombia be rebuilt after everything that has happened?**

– On the security issues I don’t believe that will be possible for now, except with the intervention of one or more outside parties, whether the OAS or a group of countries that can monitor, observe, and guarantee the conduct of both countries at the border.

– And beyond security …
The principal problem that Ecuador has with Colombia is that they both have distinct visions of their security agendas. Colombia feels that the conflict goes beyond its borders, and Ecuador feels it is an internal problem exclusive to Colombia.

Where does the rest of the region stand now that the crisis has been deactivated?

The Ecuadorian conflict crystallized a diverse range of positions in a region that has different agendas, priorities, and policies. But it didn’t reach the levels of polarization that we saw during the Cold War. What we have is a group of countries that identify with American interests, and others that prefer to distance themselves from those interests. There is no confrontation or “collision.”

Didn’t the crisis accentuate that division?

It could have, but I still believe that this isn’t a confrontation; it’s different points of view. We’re not facing two distinct political blocs; it’s simply a heterogeneous environment. The map of the region is just far more diverse than it was in the Cold War era, that’s all.

Who were the winners and losers of this conflict?

The loser, if you can call it that, is the United States. It could not play the role that it has tended to play in past crises. The forum used for the ultimate resolution was not the OAS, where it has a strong presence, but the Rio Group, which they are specifically not a part of. All of the countries there acted deliberately to impede or limit its presence. The United States came out losing because it was unable to play any part in the resolution and because it was never called upon to do so.

And the winners?

—Undoubtedly they are the three protagonists of this story. The Venezuelan president achieved a kind of political resurrection in the wake of the political hits he suffered on the international scene in late 2007. Uribe also came out with a very good standing. Despite the fact that he was implicitly censured by the majority of countries, the crisis concluded with impunity with respect to the specific instance of violence. And Ecuador, because despite its small size relative to Colombia, it has achieved a favorable international environment for protecting the security of its territory.

Despite the participation of heavyweights such as Colombia, Venezuela, Brazil, and Argentina, President Correa was able to preserve his leading role in the process. Has he consolidated his leadership in the region?

—The president’s image has been strengthened, that’s a certainty. His personality is very interesting for the rest of the world, and thanks to his firm position in the final days he was able to neutralize his image as Venezuela’s lesser ally. However, if anything was clear after the crisis, it was that he is an ally of Chávez. That’s why I say that the Venezuelan government was one of the winners. The crisis, and especially its resolution, allowed it to escape from the ostracism it seemed to be trapped by.

—Página 12, Buenos Aires, March 10, 2008
The Return to Political Ethics

By Patricia Estupiñán de Burbano

American historians were less than kind in their assessment of the administration of their 39th president, Jimmy Carter: high inflation and a geopolitical loss in Iran, with the humiliation of the kidnapping of embassy officials in Teheran and a failed military rescue. However, as a former president, he has earned the highest marks from all sources: through The Carter Center he has been the greatest ambassador for the values that made his country so celebrated—the defense of freedom, democracy, peace, and solidarity—and for which he won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002.

In effect, since he lost his reelection campaign to Ronald Reagan in 1981, Jimmy Carter has not missed a single day at his frenetic pace of public service. Together with his wife Rosalynn he founded The Carter Center in 1982, dedicated to “waging peace and alleviating human suffering.” His peace-waging efforts have resulted in some of these most impressive accomplishments: the mediation of conflicts in Bosnia and Haiti, support for electoral processes in more than 70 countries, and the permanently engaged defense of political prisoners and human rights. In terms of the alleviation of human suffering, he has completed a tenacious and successful effort to eliminate the Guinea worm in 90 percent of the affected populations, ones without access to potable water in various African countries; efforts to combat elephantiasis and river blindness in populations in Guatemala and Ecuador; campaigns to eradicate malaria and the study of alternatives to cure other poverty-related afflictions, thanks to an agreement with the prestigious Emory University, the most recognized in Georgia, the state in which The Carter Center is located.

At 84 years of age, he is completely lucid, and maintains the smile that could advertise tooth paste, for which he was so admired starting from his presidential campaign in 1976. The years have worn a slight curve in his back, but they have only further solidified the pillars of his personality: humility and dedication to moral and ethical principles. In an interview with Time magazine, he said that he felt “a kinship with Jefferson, with his humility. George Washington was almost worshiped as a deity when he left the White House. Jefferson tried to downplay the exaltation of the president above and beyond the average citizen. I was ridiculed to some degree because I carried my own bag, always, even when I was president.” This humility is reflected in his actions: He listens to his fellow negotiators attentively, demonstrating a genuine desire to learn about where and how to help. During his speech at the FLACSO conference, he made the following analysis about the process of social change going on in Ecuador:

“We believe that if this country can build solid and independent institutions, it will more easily create a common destiny and shared identity. Of course no one can come in from the outside to tell the Ecuadorian people what they should and should not do. The nature, profile and quality of the institutions being built is the sole decision and responsibility of the Ecuadorian people.”

He added that democratic institutions are not “simply bodies of law” but are instead built through the ethical actions of the men and women who involve themselves in public service. He stressed the importance of sincere democratic conduct by political representatives “because their actions are a model for social behavior.” Being a warrior on behalf of moral and ethical principles is not always well understood.

His position on the need to create a Palestinian state or suspending the embargo on Cuba has meant a separation from even fellow party members as he describes in his book “We Can Have Peace in the Holy Land” (“Podemos Alcanzar la Paz en la Tierra Santa”), published in 2009. “What’s wrong is wrong,” he sustains, while mentioning that he was born and raised in Georgia.

“My family was the only white family in my community and all of my childhood friends were black, but ... they did not have equal rights. In 1970, when
I was sworn in as governor of the state of Georgia, when Martin Luther King had started the path, I said that the time had come to end racial discrimination. Three weeks later I was on the cover of Time magazine as an unknown Southern governor, simply because of those statements.”

As president, Carter was an impassioned advocate of human rights and democracy. “The United States did not invent human rights; human rights invented the United States. The United States got involved with every dictator on the planet that would protect its North American business interests against communist threats. This was especially true in Latin America.” As a result of his efforts, the political map of the region went through a 180-degree transformation. He watched as many dictatorships were replaced by civil governments, and he finished collecting the necessary signatures for the treaty to return the canal to the people of Panama.

He observes with satisfaction that there have been significant advances in the region, even though he believes there is still a long way to go.

“Human rights were the foundation of my foreign policy during my administration. Political rights have been accepted by everyone. However, civil rights are not consistently protected: discrimination still exists in many of these countries, especially against indigenous and African American peoples, and not everyone has equal access to justice. The region has a long way to go in order to guarantee economic, social and cultural rights, which are equally important. Civil rights protect the citizens from abuses by others or by the government. Social, economic and cultural rights constitute the principal obligation of governments. They should provide their citizens with a decent, peaceful life and this peace should prevail not just in each country, but across the entire continent.

“I agree with President Obama on his decision to initiate a new relationship with Cuba and I hope that other conflicts such as the one between Ecuador and Colombia will also be resolved. Without dialogue, change is not possible. I know that Ecuador’s national dignity was hurt by the Colombian incursion at Angostura and also that the people of Colombia are suffering from the presence of a violent group of criminals that trade in drugs and call themselves “revolutionaries,” but I hope that both Ecuador and Colombia will promptly reestablish diplomatic relations in a way that will be acceptable to both countries.”

He agrees that politics and the world have changed dramatically over the past decades:

“The revolution in communications and the ability to access boundless information in real time has had a profound impact on the practices of politics. In the beginning it seemed that politics as we know it could be replaced by marketing and propaganda machines, and today there are still some who believe this. However, while the role of political parties as a source for transmitting information and mediating between leaders and voters has been severely weakened, media outlets that are solid, independent and unbiased can generate a decisive political impact. At the same time, we can build a better society and make it more difficult to hide arbitrariness, dishonesty and bad faith.”

For Carter, we are living through a rebirth of public ethics and morality. Recalling the words of his grade school teacher, Julia Coleman, he concludes:

“We should adjust to the changing times, but stand behind our unchangeable values. It is impossible to build institutions, strengthen democracy or promote the public good without respect for moral values. Historically, in order to survive, a leader must put the community’s interests above his or her own; be honest, compassionate for those who are in need and work to resolve disagreements.

“In conclusion, to address the challenges of the new historic cycle we are facing today, we need to recover our ethics and values, give a new quality to our dialogue, strengthen our shared vision and develop our ability to work together, within nations and between nations. Working together we will succeed, divided we will fail.”
Change is possible.

Excerpts from President Carter’s conference at the Latin American School of Social Sciences:

- “When I became President, there were only two democracies in South America, and one in Central America. In Argentina, and Chile, and Peru, and Brazil, and—I could go down a long list—Ecuador, Paraguay, Uruguay; they were all dictatorships. Now they’re democracies and the people have a new awareness of their own basic rights.”
- “I am happy to see the strong will of the people of Ecuador for putting an end to the decades of instability and chaos using democratic means, such as elections and the promotion of human rights. It gives me great satisfaction to know that the rights of women to participate in politics are especially protected.”
- “Some months ago, before the elections in the U.S., I was interviewed by a journalist from Great Britain, who asked me what I would do if I was the future president of the United States to change the image of America around the world in the first 100 days. And my response to him was that it can be changed in the first ten minutes, which got a laugh from the audience. I added that in my inaugural address I would say that while I’m president, we will never torture another person; we will never launch an attack on another nation unless our own security is directly threatened; we will be a leader in addressing the issue of climate change and our tax policy will benefit the poor and working families and not the rich.”
- “Consistency and perseverance in democratic conduct are the best way to preserve these institutions.”
- “Today, Latin America has one of the lowest tax burdens in the world and relies on regressive sales taxes. At the same time Latin America has the highest regional average of inequality in the world. These two facts are inextricably linked. To make progress on inequality requires a more progressive tax system.
- “Those with more resources will be more willing to share those resources if they know the resources will be used effectively and efficiently, have some certainty that the agreed-upon rules will be respected rather than arbitrarily changed and can participate in the decisions on revenue-sharing.”
- “We believe that if this country can build solid and independent institutions, it will more easily create a common destiny and shared identity. The nature, profile and quality of the institutions being built is the sole decision and responsibility of the Ecuadorian people.”

With the support of The Carter Center and the United Nations, two years ago the Binational Dialogue Group was formed, composed of Colombian and Ecuadorian citizens from different fields, to work toward greater understanding of the situations in both countries.

There are some who say that he wasn’t a great president of the United States, but almost everyone agrees that he has been the best former president that country has ever had. In effect, Jimmy Carter ended his administration on bad terms and was not reelected despite his truly admirable conduct on certain international issues such as arranging the return of the Panama Canal through the Torrijos–Carter agreements and the achievement of peace between Israel and Egypt with the Camp David Accords. But from the time he left the White House, in January 1981, Carter dedicated all of his effort and his reputation to helping to resolve conflicts, consolidate democracy, and defend human rights around the world. With these objectives, he founded The Carter Center, headquartered in Atlanta, as the organizing actor behind his initiatives.

His work has been successful and renowned worldwide. In 2002 he won the Nobel Peace Prize for his contributions to understanding between human beings and for his active participation in humanitarian causes. His prestige has continued to grow over the years, and his presence as a mediator has been sought in many international conflicts. Carter is now the voice of moral authority for his great country, which has been so diminished over the past few years.

When relations between Ecuador and Colombia became even tenser due to the conflicts at their border provoked by irregular armed incursions into Ecuador, glyphosate sprayings, and frequent diplomatic misunderstandings, Carter took the initiative to promote reconciliation between the parties through actors in civil society, under the auspices of the U.N. and with the agreement of their governments, to achieve greater understanding.

And when we were presented with Colombia’s illegal, illegitimate, armed incursion at Angostura and the breakdown in diplomatic relations, Carter acted quickly and decisively. He made several direct telephone calls to presidents Correa and Uribe to persuade them to take the first step toward normalizing their bilateral relations. He stood behind his word and his reputation, acting wisely and politically. He didn’t waste time with bureaucratic formalities, knowing that the problem, apart from the violation of a principle of international law, was also political. And he secured the reestablishment of diplomatic relations.

Carter’s leadership revealed the slowness of the OAS. His actions were more fruitful than those of that stiff organization, which missed a grand opportunity to reclaim the leadership it should wield on issues of peace and security in the region.

This is a good start. Now it is up to the two governments to make an effort so that, after making reparations on this case and recognizing their respective realities, they reestablish old mechanisms or create new ones to normalize their relations based on their commitment to mutual respect and compliance with the standards of international law. But for the moment, Ecuador and Colombia should say, “Thanks, Mr. Carter!”

—El Comercio, Quito, June 14, 2008
Good Signs Between Colombia and Ecuador

By Guillermo Rivera

The comments by the foreign ministers of Colombia and Ecuador about taking steps toward the reestablishment of diplomatic relations between their countries have been stimulating. While Colombia doubted some of the Ecuadorian government’s posture toward the FARC, Ecuador expressed its own concerns over what it considers to be a violation of the sovereignty of its territory. Colombia, for legitimate reasons, wants to defeat the FARC and demands the cooperation of its neighbors; Ecuador, for its part, has come to view respect for its territory as a matter of national honor since its past territorial conflict with Peru.

Despite the legitimacy of the complaints made by each government, neither one will benefit from keeping its diplomatic relations frozen. For one thing, it would be a shame to let the FARC come between these democratically elected neighboring governments, whose peoples have a common history and a fluid trade relationship.

The diplomatic relations between governments are borne out of the need for the citizens of one country to interact with those from another country, and this need is even stronger when the countries are neighbors. Therefore, binational relations can’t depend on the whims, arrogance, or pride of whoever is in office. This isn’t to say that there is no room for legitimate differences—on the contrary, those are normal—but international law is full of instruments for resolving them.

Now the major challenge is reopening binational relations and readdressing the issues that were unresolved before the events of March 1, 2008, such as the process of border integration, while also addressing the security agendas of both countries with an open and constructive approach. For Colombia, it will continue to be important to secure a commitment to cooperate in the fight against the FARC, while for Ecuador it will continue to be important to ensure that Colombia will live up to its commitment to not cross the border of its neighbor to the south.

How will we reach agreement on security concerns? Colombia should take the initiative but should modify its discourse, as the one it forced across our borders is the same one it has expressed within them. In effect, the Colombian government has repeatedly expressed that the democratic security policy must be established to defeat all illegal armed organizations that are active in its national territory, and the majority of Colombians support that idea. But assuming that the citizens of other nations, whether they’re neighbors or not, should fully support that notion without them living through Colombia’s reality is just wishful thinking.

Colombia needs to come up with a persuasive, diplomatic and intelligent strategy to achieve the region’s wholehearted support for its fight against the FARC. Ecuador should be the top priority of such a strategy, first of all because right now there is a receptive environment for it and second of all because its cooperation is absolutely necessary for the total success of its democratic security policy.

This is how the reestablishment of binational relations has become, for the Colombian government, an immense obstacle to its goal of achieving effective cooperation with our neighboring country to the south.

—El Periódico, Bogotá, June 21, 2008
SHOOTING OURSELVES IN THE FOOT

By Grace Jaramillo

Despite the fact that the week in politics has put out fires on all fronts for the government, we need to reflect (I would prefer the term reconsider) on what we are and aren’t doing with this country’s international relations. A year and a half of government and we are still without a clear, directional foreign policy, in which we all know where we’re going and why. Some would say this can be found in the National Development Plan, which had a chapter on foreign policy; others would say that this government’s foreign policy is the defense of our sovereignty. However, the events of this week have shown us that neither of those options is the case.

First, sovereignty means responsibility for a territorial space and for the community of people who live within it. Sovereignty means defending the interests of society as a whole against the external and also defending its own democratic construction, according to its pace and its needs. At least these are the concepts that we discuss in the classes on sovereignty, in a sense simpler, and yet also more difficult to achieve than the old absolute concepts of the Westphalian era. Sovereignty cannot be defended with sovereignty—it is defended because there are people inside who have built a common way of life, and if we can’t understand this, we’ve lost our way.

Second, when sovereignty is everything, it winds up meaning nothing ... nothing that really changes anyone’s life for the better. And now if we address the key issues: Not reestablishing diplomatic relations with Colombia is affecting the sovereignty of the people who live in Imbabura, in Carchi, in Esmeraldas, and Sucumbíos, to start with. It directly affects all of the tradespeople and entrepreneurs who do business with Colombia, and it’s keeping in waiting all of the entrepreneurs who were involved in or planning investments to generate work related to the Colombian market. This is the sovereignty that we should be defending. The Angostura incident was met by diplomatic and moral condemnation of Colombia in almost every forum on the continent. What more do we want? That international relations should be some kind of medieval duel over a lady’s handkerchief? Shouldn’t we look for mechanisms to work together even though we can’t stand the Colombian government? Colombia bears a lot of responsibility, but we will have to make our own mea culpa.

But we have the same problem with trade issues: We’re always in limbo with the CAN–European Union negotiations; we align ourselves with Bolivia without real incentive, and now we adopt the Return Directive—which affects illegal immigrants—as a good pretext for threatening, rather than using this directive as a negotiating point. Once again, Ecuador fails to understand the world and its place within it. To have sovereignty, you have to negotiate, with effectiveness and professionalism. And negotiating does not mean coming in with immovable positions, but rather resolving problems, entering into the world rather than leaving it, and doing so without a chip on your shoulders. The greatest risk for sovereignty is that we stop negotiating or, better said, that we have such low self esteem that we end up shooting ourselves in the foot.

—El Comercio, Quito, June 28, 2008
AN IMPERATIVE
RECONCILIATION

BY SOCORRO RAMÍREZ

In addition to restricting imports, a month after it revived the requirement of a criminal background check for Colombians, the Ecuadorian government opted to add the need to have it notarized before the Foreign Ministry.

It is absurd to think that multiplying the requirements for persons passing legally across the border would reduce the flow of crime. That’s why, rather than addressing the problem of crime, this measure and the unfortunate support of the minister of Government seem to insist on fingerling Colombia as the only source of Ecuador’s problems.

The Colombian foreign minister called the measure an act of “discriminatory, stigmatizing, and even xenophobic treatment,” in response to which the Ecuadorian counterpart reiterated the idea that, in order to reestablish relations, both parties must overcome what Ecuador perceives as an attempt to “undermine Ecuador.” She added that she “hoped that the concern of the Colombian government and its Advisory Commission would translate into concrete actions.”

This refers to the petition made by the Advisory Commission to the Colombian government to renew efforts to reestablish relations with Ecuador, and also to President Uribe’s choice of words on January 23 when he said: “It would be wonderful if we could take steps to rebuild these relations.”

The government of Colombia is beginning to show signs of wanting to move past public statement to positive steps. This shift can be seen in the decisions Uribe announced on January 25 in Pasto, in response to the petition of the Advisory Commission and the requests of the Ecuadorian government. In addition to the 27,000 members of the armed forces already present at the border, in Nariño a Unified Command of the South and a permanent brigade of the Army will be established.

Uribe also brought other initiatives to Pasto, such as the investment fund to help stimulate the bleak situation in Nariño and Putumayo after the fall of the pyramids. And the minister of Defense heard out the protests of the Cofán indigenous people over the installation of a military unit so close to their community. Development, social empowerment, and a presence beyond the military will allow the state to turn around the situation at the border.

At the start of President Correa’s third year and in the middle of a new electoral campaign, the Ecuadorian government has had its sphere of action diminish due to the world economic crisis, the drop in petroleum prices, the reduction of revenue, and the problems caused by the dollarization of currency in its country. All of this, in addition to social protests, problems with its economic policy, and commitments assumed in the new constitution, will demand that Ecuador adopt an open and proactive attitude to address the range of its complex problems. An agreement with Colombia would be beneficial.

Colombia and Ecuador will benefit from the normalization of relations. More than ever, each country will have to remember that for the sake of its own security it will need stable and prosperous neighbors.

—El Espectador, Bogotá, January 27, 2009
The Country to the North
By Grace Jaramillo
This country that’s on the other side of the Mataje river, of San Miguel or Putumayo, that also shares borders with Venezuela, Brazil, Peru, Panama, and even more countries, cannot be reduced to “Uribismo,” to its democratic security policy, or its war against the FARC.

It is a country that, despite everything it has weathered, continues to fight, continues making endless pleas for its kidnapping victims, and continues insisting to everyone—to the guerrillas, the paramilitaries, the assassins—on its right to live in peace and without violence. They are a people who have struggled to survive the deaths of their loved ones, to their international shame.

Sometimes as Ecuadorians we forget that this Colombia exists, and we confuse it with President Uribe, drug trafficking, and even with violence itself. Sometimes we must seem the same way, even though it isn’t so. We have even forgotten that there is a civil society in Colombia, a society that is capable of getting organized, debating, and protesting things that it feels are unjust.

This week, for example, a forum was held in Pasto that was organized not by the central government but rather by the National University of Colombia, by the mayor’s office of Pasto, and by the governor’s office of Nariño, which is led by former militant member of the M-19 Antonio Navarro Wolff. During the forum, dozens of inhabitants of the border zone attended to express their demands, which are as simple and straightforward as one can imagine: community projects to collect shells, binational training on traditional fishing, a joint agreement for managing solid waste, the removal of the background check requirement so that entrepreneurs can sell guinea pigs in Ecuador and bring tomatoes to Colombia, and binational tourism development projects, so that the routes can be shared. During the parade in Carchi on Colombian territory you could barely notice any differences—the same houses, the same gardens, and the same poverty.

The list of requests from these modest people—side by side—who only want to live in peace and have work to do, will never end. That same Monday, we learned of two new tragedies in Pasto: Seven indigenous Awás from the Colombian side had been murdered by the FARC, and a candidate for mayor, from the same side, had been murdered by paid assassins, perhaps associated with the paramilitaries. The Colombian conflict in its full dimensions: The statistics might horrify us, but they don’t move our conscience.

It is crystal clear that the government’s position is not to reestablish diplomatic relations, but the people no longer agree. Maybe now is the time to talk, to understand one another, even if it’s only about the minimum shared agenda.

The people who live along the northern border and on the Colombian side—in the midst of poverty, danger, and abandonment—are also a part of our sovereignty. And if we have to give some ground, on both sides, so that they can have a better life, it will be well worth it.

—El Comercio, Quito, February 15, 2009
Hope for the President to Remain Silent

By Augusto Ramírez Ocampo

A few weeks ago, President Rafael Correa warned that diplomatic relations would wind up being settled in the legal forums in which he had already initiated a claim over the fumigations at the border.

These actions flared up from the indictment issued by a judge in Sucumbíos against former minister Juan Manuel Santos and the resulting petition for a “blue” notice by Interpol, which caused for the first time a strong and justified reaction by the state.

Now, the Attorney General of Ecuador has asked Interpol for a “red” notice on Dr. Santos, to lead to his arrest anywhere around the world.

To these acts of judicial belligerence we can add the serious commercial decision, in violation of all Andean norms, of imposing exorbitant customs standards on 1,460 products, only for Colombia.

We see fewer and fewer paths to diplomatic solutions and, without renouncing them altogether, the country should become deeply familiar with Ecuador’s intentions to judicialize our bilateral relations and prepare itself to respond within the same channels, as is its legitimate right in applying the U.N.’s resolutions against terrorism, along with many decisions by the OAS and by other subregional organizations.

On the issue of commercial aggression, Colombia has an obligation to address them through the appropriate institutions within the Andean Community of Nations and the World Trade Organization.

We should continue exploring other forums for international diplomacy, including the mediation of such figures as former U.S. President Jimmy Carter or some distinguished European leaders who would surely be disposed to support any effort to normalize our relations.

And finally: We can only hope that Mr. President will stay quiet.

—El Tiempo, Bogotá, July 12, 2009
The prison order for Colombian Minister of Defense Juan Manuel Santos and the tit-for-tat response by a group of attorneys from Bogotá to prosecute former Minister Gustavo Larrea and President Rafael Correa added fuel to the fire of the deteriorated political relations between these two governments and confirmed that, at least for the time being, diplomatic reconciliation will remain an uphill battle.

Throughout a year and a half without relations, there has been no shortage of efforts such as the summit of the Rio Group in the Dominican Republic or the good offices of OAS Secretary General José Miguel Insulza and of former U.S. President Jimmy Carter to overcome the impasse. The positions have proven inflexible, however, and the demands for reestablishing dialogue mutually unacceptable. It is also likely that the personalities of the two presidents, Rafael Correa and Álvaro Uribe, have also played a part in this deterioration.

Although ideologically speaking Correa and Uribe are on opposite shores, they could be twins in terms of their obstinacy and inflexibility. The roots of the conflict go much deeper than the incident at Angostura, however, which merely served as a trigger.

On one side we have years of Colombian deafness to Ecuador’s complaints over the ecological damage produced by the aerial fumigation with glyphosate and the costs of protecting thousands of refugees. On the other side we have Colombia’s conviction that Ecuador has been blind to offer asylum to irregular groups that are engaged in a war against Colombia. Talking about the differences between reality and perception is useless because perceptions are the reality of whoever perceives them. To untangle this giant knot, both perspectives have to be changed.

Unfortunately, the passage of time has only deepened the wounds. Given that we share a border of almost 600 kilometers, there should be major citizen demands to reestablish relations. However, given that the affected people are those along the border who lack political weight in both countries, this pressure has not materialized.

Given that we share a border of almost 600 kilometers, there should be major citizen demands to reestablish relations. However, given that the affected people are those along the border who lack political weight in both countries, this pressure has not materialized.

The damage affected tourism, from which the border provinces benefit. In the past year 30 percent fewer Colombians came to visit, deterred by the new, costly and bureaucratic requirements of a notarized criminal background check. Furthermore, there have been other lesions that were painful for the border populations: More than 50 binational projects are behind schedule.

Paradoxically the biggest winners of the conflict are the elements that both Correa and Uribe struggle against: the irregular groups and drug trafficking. A porous border, without contact between the governments, is a paradise for such elements. The best example was the series of reports broadcast on Ecuavisa...
in which the FARC broadcast its slogans with contagious music to both Colombians and Ecuadorians. On the other side, the number of hectares of coca in Colombia grew from 70,000 to 99,000 in this period, and in Ecuador the amount of confiscated material rose from 25 tons to 30 tons. The thorniest issue, though, is evidence that the country is allowing the illegal drug-trafficking networks to carve out a so-called Pacific Route. The coastal provinces of the North are suffering from its havoc.

Esmeraldas is a good example. This should be the most powerful reason for returning to cooperation and reestablishing our relations. The tentacles of terrorism and drug trafficking are so powerful that, even with the collaboration of allied governments, they cannot be controlled—just look at Mexico and the United States. As long as our governments aren’t talking, these lawbreakers are in paradise.

—Vistazo magazine, Guayaquil, July 18, 2009

Binational Tension
By Gonzalo Ruiz Álvarez

The state of relations between Ecuador and Colombia—between their governments—has been better. The escalation of verbal barbs and tension has brought us to a seemingly worrisome point.

As if the verbal tension weren’t potent enough, the geopolitical map of the region has been contaminated by new elements: the announcement of military agreements between the United States and Colombia on several air bases, and the belligerent and anti-imperialist railings of the ineffable Hugo Chávez.

Bellicose winds, war drums and other shrill gestures played into the deteriorating discourse, stopped just in time by the successful intervention of the Brazilian president, Lula da Silva, supported by the wisdom and balance offered by Cristina Fernández and Father Lugo, just when the golpista leader of Venezuela’s lust for stardom threatened to steal the show at the UNASUR summit. As I see it, there is an open competition for leadership in the region that was drawn forth in that forum. The Colombian bases will be discussed only in Álvaro Uribe’s presence and to ensure that there are no remaining loose ends; Obama will be invited as well, although it will be difficult for him to attend the summit in Bariloche.

In the heated context of the map of northern South America, and beyond the tensions that have arisen between Caracas and Bogotá, Quito plays a special role. The incidents leading up to the release of the video by the man known under the alias “Mono Jojoy,” in which he alleges his financial support for the campaign of candidate Rafael Correa, the official
submission of a copy of that video to the Ecuadorian Foreign Ministry and the surrender of the diary of the person behind the alias “Raúl Reyes,” handled by the Ministry of Government or the Ecuadorian attorney general, have reached a level of investigation where those implicated and suspected once belonged to the highest levels of government: Gustavo Larrea and Ignacio Chauvin.

In Colombian public opinion the perception couldn’t be any worse, and on the international stage we have a lot to lose in terms of our image, judging by what has been published in the global press.

The issue of relations with Colombia will continue to have other important angles. The imposition of customs procedures causes an impact on the habitually fruitful trade relations between the two nations, especially between the inhabitants of the border zone, who earn their living off of that dynamic. This could hurt Ecuadorian exports through an appreciable reduction in sources of employment. The measure would cause the review of slightly more than 680 of the 1,347 initial shipments, according to the analysis and decision of the Andean Community.

Some 84 percent of Ecuadorians think that the government should do something to improve relations with Colombia and think that the two nations’ diplomatic issues are affecting them, according to a recent poll by Perfiles de Opinión. Cedatos calls the break in relations a negative aspect, among several others, of the current administration.

Lowering the tone of the verbal sparring match and avoiding any possibility of a military confrontation is an urgent priority for both peoples.

— El Comercio, Quito, August 13, 2009

Drums of Peace
By Francisco Carrión Mena

It’s encouraging to hear the recent exchange of public statements by presidents Correa and Uribe on their commitment to fostering conditions for the normalization of relations between Ecuador and Colombia. After the repetitions of “forgive us” offered by the Colombian head of state for the bombing of Angostura, a few days later the disposition of his Ecuadorian counterpart to seeking channels for dialogue followed. Consistent with these presidential statements, the foreign ministers of both countries have shared a cordial first meeting in Lima. Sound the drums of peace!

How do we put this reciprocal good will into action? Ecuador was attacked and various principles of international law were violated—after which Colombia asked for forgiveness in the Rio Group, and the region offered us its unequivocal support—which gave Ecuador the legitimate right to make, as it had already done with confidence, certain demands. Colombia should and can fulfill them and, moreover, some are already on their way to being fulfilled. These demands are: (1) Increase the military presence on its southern border, a decision that President Uribe has already
announced. (2) Cease linking Ecuadorian authorities with the FARC, which will entail a serious but feasible commitment on the part of the Colombian government. (3) Allocate resources for the refugees in Ecuador, which is Colombia’s obligation and can be handled through the establishment of a suitable mechanism. (4) Make reparations for the bombing—and also for the incidents in previous years—which requires political will, but the amounts are not too great. (5) Turn over information on the Angostura operation, which is the most difficult requirement to fulfill, but Ecuador has a legitimate right to ask for it.

To air the issues we could create a technical-military commission. Our demands obviously also include proposals by Colombia that consider its reality, above all on the positive agenda: border integration, trade, cooperation, etc. If we can put together that package, it will be sufficient to repair our bilateral relations. Direct dialogue between the parties is otherwise the best way of understanding each other. Some of the mediators have been worn down, which is why the best alternative is bilateral negotiation. We are mature enough and we know each other well enough to talk face to face. These conversations have to be reserved. The greatest enemy of diplomatic efforts is the microphone.

The heads of state have already indicated their political will to reach an agreement; now we must allow the foreign ministers to work discreetly. And another thing: we should not commit, at least publicly, to any deadlines for seeing results, but if we act with enough speed to match the pace of Colombia’s internal politics, in terms of its elections, they won’t trap us.

—El Comercio, Quito, August 22, 2009
Contributions of the Binational Dialogue Group: Brief Final Thoughts

In the following pages, the contributions of the Binational Dialogue Group during its first phase of work (from September 2007 to May 2009) will be systematized, as identified by members in the testimonies and reflections included in this publication. To simplify the analysis of these contributions, we separated them into three different levels of impact: (1) individual, (2) group, and (3) context.

By doing so, we hope to demonstrate how an initiative, such as the Ecuador–Colombia Binational Dialogue Group, can contribute to improving and strengthening relations between two countries and produce positive effects in other areas that, indirectly, support the same objective.

We should remember the initial objectives that members of the Binational Dialogue Group proposed when they met for the first time in Atlanta in 2007:

“To contribute to improving and strengthening relations between both countries.”

“To try to influence within our spheres of activity and the scope of our abilities in order to promote the common objective and to expand the possibilities for joint cooperation, where concrete opportunities to do so exist.”

Many group members considered that an essential part of the process was the “catharsis.” Being able to speak with openness and to be heard enabled them to overcome barriers and move past perceptions that had prevented them from understanding their counterparts from the other country. This transformation allowed them to move toward a more productive dialogue and a better understanding of other perspectives. For example, catharsis led to a better understanding of the importance of respect for national sovereignty to many Ecuadorians as well as the deep desire of many Colombians to see an end to the decades of violence they have endured.

Capacity for Listening and Understanding

The methodology used during the process encouraged the development of the listening and understanding skills of the group members, which allowed everyone to take full advantage of the exchanges with, and
contributions of each member. This forum for binational dialogue gave the group members the opportunity to consider the issues from different perspectives and expand their own views to take these diverse points of view into account. During the group’s discussions, members examined relations between Ecuador and Colombia, not only politically and diplomatically but also in terms of the perspective of civil society and the daily lives of people living along the border. The exercise allowed each member to walk a mile in another’s shoes and consider new parameters.

Many members stated that, from the outset, they could never have imagined that the results yielded would reach as far as they did. For example, group member Ricardo Estrada reminded us that at the beginning of the exercise, it was hard to imagine being able to think from the other side’s perspective, but by the end it was not so difficult. According to Estrada, there was a change in mentality, and their positions were brought much closer from the beginning to the end of the group’s first phase of work.

Respect and Empowerment

The atmosphere of respect and esteem maintained throughout the process facilitated the building of relationships based on trust and allowed the members to express and enrich themselves. All had the opportunity to be heard and to participate in sincere dialogue, in which their contributions were valued.

Some group members experienced personal transformation or empowerment, whereas others experienced a deeper connection with the dialogue values and methods they had previously learned (see Augusto Ramírez Ocampo’s testimony as an example). Designed as a flexible and creative environment, the Binational Dialogue Group offered each of its members the opportunity to develop different strengths and focus on issues of their particular interest (gender, development, culture, etc).

The Satisfaction of Working for a Just Cause

In general, the members expressed a sense of satisfaction from working toward a cause that they considered just and worthwhile. This feeling served as a source of motivation for the group, even in difficult moments. It was satisfying to reach agreements and arrive at mutual understandings, despite different national policies. Gradually, members of the group gained confidence in the process, appreciating the dialogue, methodology, and results more with each meeting.

Learning

Group members acquired a great deal of knowledge on relations between Ecuador and Colombia as well as on the internal situation of each country. A substantial portion of this knowledge was provided directly, and shared, by members of the group. Valuable sources of knowledge included meetings with representatives of each government and with representatives of organizations involved in issues linked with binational relations, the participation of members in initiatives in this realm, and the writings and analysis of some members. The initiative also allowed group members to better understand the processes of foreign policy decision-making in each country as well as the reality at the border.

Another learning opportunity came from exposure to, and the chance to interact with, people with so much career experience and/or many important responsibilities in their respective fields. These individuals included other group members and figures who contributed significantly to the process, sharing their insights and perspectives with the group. The collective experience and knowledge gained throughout the Binational Dialogue Group’s work contributed to a deeper understanding and appreciation of the complex dynamics at play along the Ecuador-Colombia border.
from the two governments. Interacting with both presidents and some of their ministers was an important milestone. Members did not exclusively apply this knowledge and experience within the context of the Binational Dialogue Group. They also made use of these contributions in their personal and professional lives. In particular, some adopted and applied the dialogue methodologies in other circumstances, while others used their acquired knowledge or newfound networks to address binational issues in their professional fields.

Contributions of the Experience on a Group Level

At the group level, the principal contributions of the experience centered on: (1) collective energy and common agenda, (2) synergy and jointly promoted actions, and (3) building trust and relationships.

Collective Energy and the Common Agenda

Throughout the first phase of work, a collective dynamic developed that resulted in greater motivation and determination for the group. As the phase concluded, the group reflected extensively on whether it was useful and opportune to begin a second phase of work. Although some members initially felt that the initiative should not be extended, in discussions the group concluded that its accumulated experience should not go to waste and that it should find a way to expand the initiative to include new people and sectors from Ecuador and Colombia. There was agreement on the importance of persevering in spite of the difficulties and beginning a new phase, which kept in mind the lessons learned from the first phase.

The group dynamic prioritized the collective interest over the individual interests of each member. As the group went along, the members began to increasingly appreciate areas of agreement and the need to work together in order to tackle their common problems, such as the difficult socio-economic conditions of the border populations or insecurity. This allowed group members to collectively focus on a more comprehensive agenda that included such issues as border development, binational mechanisms for assistance to refugees, and the ability of the media to promote solidarity between peoples.

Synergies and Joint Actions

The mutual comprehension achieved by group members facilitated the joint search for consensus-based proposals to improve relations between both governments and societies. As a product of the last three binational dialogue meetings in the first phase of work, the group developed a joint agenda of binational initiatives that it committed to try to promote. To keep track of each of these initiatives, at least one member from each nation was nominated to take charge of an initiative. Some of the initiatives, such as the letters to both presidents and the binational academic forums, took place during the first phase of work, whereas others were left pending due to the political context or other circumstances. In the second binational dialogue meeting in Bogotá, which concluded the first phase of work, the group committed to examining initiatives it had not been able to implement before beginning its next phase of work.

At the same time, the members found common ground despite different perspectives on, and solutions to, difficult circumstances. In this way, they were able to better evaluate the impact of potential actions and adjust strategies for their attempts to improve or at the least prevent further deterioration of relations between the two countries. This exchange of

35 See the testimonies of Grace Jaramillo, Guillermo Rivera, Ricardo Estrada, and Sandra Suárez.

36 See the testimonies of Pedro Velasco, Ricardo Estrada, Antonio Navarro, Margarita Carranco, and Andrés Valdivieso.
perspectives and ideas helped the group act prudently and find new approaches. This does not mean that the members weren’t free to take whatever action they deemed appropriate in a given situation but that they had an opportunity to discuss collective strategies for handling difficult situations and to share their perspectives. The exchange of opinion was often accompanied by group reflections on mistakes and successes,37 which helped the group draw lessons for the future.

Building Trust and Relationships
Gradually the ties between the members of the Binational Dialogue Group were strengthened, and an environment of trust was established. This was evident in the supportive manner with which the members treated their counterparts in the most difficult of moments as well as the cooperation between group members to move the binational initiatives forward and the constant exchange of information and contacts. The group’s solidarity and maturity were demonstrated by its ability to move past the events of March 1, 2008, and work toward the improvement of relations.38 Various members have agreed that the group could probably never have weathered the rup-

37 See the testimony of Margarita Carranco.
38 For Ricardo Ávila, the fact that the Binational Dialogue Group did not dissolve and was able to maintain its cohesion, despite the challenging circumstances, was an important milestone.
ture caused by these events without the earlier rounds of dialogue in Atlanta and Quito. It was this shared experience that motivated some of the members to keep in touch with their counterparts, to compare their perceptions of the situation, and to come up with ways out of it. For Augusto Ramírez Ocampo, it was “a miracle” that there had been two meetings of the Binational Dialogue Group prior to March 1, 2008. He felt that so much trust had already been established in those meetings that the March 1 events could not divide the group.39

The relationships established with representatives from different fields also encouraged a complementarity of perspectives and combined effort.40 Various members commented that the network established has a multiplier effect within each of the sectors represented by group members and can help to sustain the dynamics of binational dialogue when the group ceases to formally exist.

**IMPACT ON THE CONTEXT**

Prior to the disruption of diplomatic relations, the Binational Dialogue Group began with the objective of helping to strengthen relations between Ecuador and Colombia on different levels. While the context changed dramatically with the break in relations, the group stayed the course and remained dedicated to achieving its objectives. This effort contributed to a favorable environment in society for re-establishing diplomatic relations and for preventing the further deterioration of the situation.

**Expanding the Debate on Relations Between Ecuador and Colombia**

As Adrián Bonilla pointed out, one of the greatest contributions of the first phase of the Binational Dialogue Group was to expand the debate on the state of relations between Ecuador and Colombia. By bringing to the table an agenda with positive themes and calling attention to the effects that the disruption of diplomatic relations had on the daily lives of the border population, the group helped to “citizen-ify” a bilateral agenda that focused on governmental relations between presidents and added new elements that encouraged a more comprehensive perspective when approaching the topic. The group disseminated a great deal of information and analysis on the Ecuador-Colombia issue through editorials and articles published by members and through initiatives assumed by each member (e.g., participation in forums, meetings with government representatives, etc). At the same time, the group served as an informal space where members could discuss key issues that affected binational relations, because there were no official channels of dialogue. From this context, useful proposals emerged for championing the causes of binational problems and making progress toward items on the positive agenda, such as border development.41

**Promoting New Ways of Thinking in Both Countries**

Thanks to their personal and professional relationships in key fields and their influence on public opinion, group members promoted new ways of thinking about the relationship between the two countries. They emphasized the things that unite the two countries to counter the tendency to focus on what separates them. A Colombian member of the group, for example,

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39 For Augusto Ramírez Ocampo, it was “a miracle” that there had been two meetings of the Binational Dialogue Group prior to March 1, 2008. He felt that so much trust had already been established in those meetings that the March 1 events could not divide the group.

40 For example, Margarita Carranco relates how she got in touch with two other members of the group—Antonio Navarro Wolff and Pedro Velasco—when she was faced with a case of inhumane treatment of Colombian women. Through these contacts, as well as contacts with the Colombian Foreign Ministry, she helped organize the return of these women to Colombia and secure guarantees of their protection. In a similar fashion, Antonio Navarro Wolff contacted Manuel Chiriboga to evaluate the possibility of stimulating the rural economy in the southern part of the border department of Narino with the production of broccoli.

41 See the testimony of Socorro Ramírez.
executed a major public campaign in the department of Nariño to reinforce the solidarity that exists between these peoples by distributing stickers and hanging banners that read: “Colombia–Ecuador: A Single Identity.” A banner with a similar message was displayed in the stands during a soccer match between Ecuador and Colombia in June 2008, thanks to the efforts of four group members.

In addition, the group members helped to spread information about the reality of the neighboring country. In Ecuador, a fuller understanding of the situation facing the Colombian people, in terms of armed conflict, was promoted. In Colombia, attention was drawn to Ecuadorian efforts to provide assistance to Colombian refugees. One initiative that was guided by the same objectives was the production of a binational documentary program on Ecuador and Colombia. Under the direction of Manuel Chiriboga, from the Ecuadorian side, and the Colombian journalist Claudia Gurisatti, this documentary helped publicize the positive agenda and stimulate deeper understanding of the situations in both countries and in the border zones. Along the same lines, the group members organized two public forums designed to build bridges between Colombia and Ecuador: one in Quito in September 2008 and the other in Pasto in February 2009. Representatives from the three border areas (the Pacific, Andean, and Amazonian zones) attended these forums and shared their daily experiences with the audience, along with the importance of binational relations for increasing development in the border region.

Bringing Different Spheres and Levels Together

The efforts of the Binational Dialogue Group helped to bring the two countries closer on different spheres and levels: local governments, media outlets, development projects, etc. The group acted as a facilitator and catalyst. By having access to the highest levels of decision-making and border realities in each country, the group served as a bridge that brought the reality of life along the border to the decision-makers. In private meetings with government representatives, members of the group—especially those from the border zones—provided information on the state of affairs for the people living along the border. Moreover, as previously mentioned, two binational forums were held with government representatives as well as the border populations in attendance. Hundreds of representatives from both sides of the border attended the binational meeting in Pasto, where they shared experiences and proposals. That material was later collected in a publication that was distributed to both governments and different sectors of civil society.
Through the different spheres in which the members were active, the impact of the Binational Dialogue Group was visible in multiple social sectors, including academic institutions, business organizations, and women’s organizations. The testimonies collected in this report reveal the ways in which each group member drew on past experiences to influence his or her own context. Some initiatives came about spontaneously, like the development of a binational mechanism to address a case of inhumane treatment of some Colombian women in Ecuador.

**Permanent Monitoring of Binational Relations**

Group members served as permanent monitors of the state of relations between their countries and intervened at opportune moments, often discretely. As various members pointed out, it was like “having a warning signal” or a “candle of vigil” for civil society to draw the government’s attention to the importance of addressing the problems that exist between the two countries, as those most affected are the people, especially people in the border region.\(^{42}\) In this regard, an initiative worth highlighting was when the group collected more than 290 signatures from leaders in Colombia and Ecuador urging both presidents to re-establish diplomatic relations between their countries. Furthermore, the group met with both presidents and some of their ministers in order to gain their perspectives on the state of binational relations and to share the perspectives of group members, as actors in civil society, along with some proposals to advance positive agenda items. Despite the immense challenge posed by confronting a dynamic of reciprocal criticism at the highest levels of government in both countries, this monitoring activity by civil society may have helped keep the governments aware of their citizens’ demands for improvement in relations between their countries and the benefits that come from addressing existing problems through dialogue rather than confrontation.

During the first phase of work, some of the group members who were closest to the decision-makers played a key role in persuading their respective governments to moderate public statements in order to avoid any escalation of the conflict and to make small gestures that would help to rebuild a sense of mutual trust. Furthermore, group members stressed the importance of dialogue and better understanding between the two countries, not just at the highest levels of government but also between the civil society and local government. Although at the time these testimonies were written, governmental relations had deteriorated and a low level of trust persisted that complicated the group’s potential actions, it continued to make low-profile gestures in an attempt to, if nothing else, at least slow a potentially dangerous spiral.

As Luis Carlos Villegas noted in his testimony, though there were no concrete results in terms of government relations, the group was able to send a message to the highest levels that there were citizens on both sides working together for the good of their countries.

42 See the testimony of Patricia Estupiñán.
Influence on Public Opinion
During the first phase of work, group members—particularly journalists and editors—influenced public opinion by evaluating the situation from different angles and thereby contributed to preventing the repercussions that governmental conflict could have on relationships between societies. For example, they sought to counteract statements that could foster xenophobia toward Colombians living in Ecuador and stressed the fact that the requirement of a criminal background check (pasado judicial) for crossing the border ultimately punishes the neighboring populations. In the same fashion, in Colombia they sought to change the stereotype of Ecuador as the “little brother” and tried to present the two countries on equal footing.

From the beginning, the group understood the role the media can play in escalating or reducing the level of governmental conflict. Although some members believe that they could have done even more in this realm, there was an overall awareness of the importance of working at the level of public opinion. This consciousness played out in the sense that, in addition to the opinion columns or articles written on Ecuador–Colombia relations by group members, there was also a diffusion component wherein the majority of the public initiatives promoted by the Binational Dialogue Group were publicized in the media in order to increase their impact and reach a wider audience. The journalists in the group played a key role in this effort.

Contributions to Initiatives Organized by Other Actors
The Binational Dialogue Group supported initiatives carried out by other institutions such as The Carter Center, the United Nations, the OAS, FLACSO, and the National University of Colombia. The group also served as a source of inspiration and proposals, and it participated in the organization of events orchestrated by these other entities. In some cases, the group acted as a catalyst, helping to flesh out initiatives started by different sectors, principally by the civil society, or to facilitate the communication between the actors on each side.

Finally, there exists a general recognition of the fact that the experience of the Binational Dialogue Group could be useful in similar contexts in other parts of the world. It could be replicated, and other initiatives could benefit from the group’s reflections as well as the evaluations performed by external actors such as the UNDP or The Carter Center.

Final Words
The review offered in this chapter allowed an assessment of the potential of a group similar to the Binational Dialogue Group. Diverse factors came together in such a way that, overall, the group’s contributions surpassed its initial objectives. In the aftermath of the events of March 1, 2008, there was an expectation that, through its leadership, the group could contribute to the re-establishment of diplomatic relations between countries (perhaps not at the ambassadorial level but at least at the level of chargé d'affaires). The majority of the members agree that the fact that diplomatic relations had not been re-established between the two countries at the time when the group ended its activities does not mean that the group had failed. On the contrary, they feel that it played an important role in preventing conflict and that it helped to lower tensions and avoid escalation by serving as a “permanent monitor” of the situation.

At the same time, there seems to be consensus on the fact that the contributions of the group on the individual level exceeded the expectations of its members. They identified catharsis, empowerment,
and learning among the elements of personal transformation from which they benefited. These contributions on a personal level, as well as the benefits from the group dynamic and the creation of networks, were valuable beyond this experience. Group members used them to help improve relations between the two countries in different spheres, enjoying the complementarity of perspectives and knowledge that a multidisciplinary group can offer. This produced a multiplier effect in different fields and sectors of the population. The dissemination of the ideas and messages of the group contributed to broadening the debate on relations between Ecuador and Colombia, both in public opinion as well as between decision-makers. Finally, the experience served as an example of how people can work together for the good of their countries. With just its existence and persistence, the group demonstrated an important lesson on the value of dialogue for the situation between Ecuador and Colombia and, potentially, for other regions of the world.
### Appendix A

#### Time Line

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Line of the Binational Dialogue Group</th>
<th>The Time Line in Context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October 2002</td>
<td>Binational technical commission for glyphosate verification.</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 2002</td>
<td>Ecuador demands that Colombia</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Suspend aerial sprayings until their effects could be investigated</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- And afterward respect a 10-km-wide zone along the border when fumigating.</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 2003</td>
<td>Colombia “temporarily” suspension of its fumigations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 2003</td>
<td>Colombia resumes its use of glyphosate. Ecuador announces that it will file charges against Colombia in The Hague.</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 2004</td>
<td>Ecuador presents a complaint about Colombia’s fumigations with herbicides before the OAS.</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 2004</td>
<td>Colombia increases its use of coca eradication by hand to reduce the use of glyphosate.</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 2004</td>
<td>Local residents of Nariño resist fumigations or manual eradication.</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 2004</td>
<td>President Uribe decides that the mediation efforts of Chávez and Córdoba have run their course.</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 2004</td>
<td>President Uribe authorizes the possibility of a humanitarian agreement with the facilitation of the Catholic Church and the support of leaders from other countries.</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 18</td>
<td>The FARC announces the release of some hostages.</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 31</td>
<td>After delays and doubts, the mission to rescue hostages is suspended.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 12-14</td>
<td>First binational dialogue round between Colombia and Ecuador in Atlanta.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
January 10
The FARC releases Clara Rojas and Consuelo González after mediation by the Venezuelan government.

January 15
President Uribe offers peace negotiations with the FARC.

January 16
Ecuador urges the use of an international committee to negotiate the release of more hostages by the FARC.

February 1-2
Second binational dialogue round between Colombia and Ecuador in Quito.

February 2
The FARC announces that it will turn over hostages to the Venezuelan president.

February
The mediating commission made up by Switzerland, France, Spain, and the Church of Colombia is questioned by the FARC, who want President Chávez involved, among others.

February 21
Galó Mora (member of the BDG) becomes the minister of culture of Ecuador.

February 27
The FARC releases congressional representatives after mediation by the Venezuelan president.

March 1
Colombian troops attack a FARC base camp and cross the border into Ecuador; 26 people are killed, including the guerilla group’s second in command, “Raúl Reyes.”

Ecuador response:
The president of Ecuador calls the incursion an attack on his territory and orders a military investigation.

March 2
Ecuador demands a “formal apology” from Colombia, compensation for damages, and a promise not to repeat these “unacceptable events.” The ambassadors are withdrawn and expelled. Requests a meeting of the OAS. Mobilizes its troops.

Colombia response:
Bogotá responds that it “did not violate the sovereignty” of Ecuador but was merely acting in its own “legitimate defense.” It announces that it has discovered information that demonstrates the “ties” between the Ecuadorian government and the FARC.

March 3
Ecuador terminates its diplomatic relations with Colombia. Ecuadorian Coordinating Minister of Security Gustavo Larrea confirms that he met with Reyes to talk about the release of hostages held by the FARC.

March 4
Simultaneous national emergency meetings of the BDG take place in Quito and Bogotá.

March
Meeting of the OAS Security Council. The decision is that Colombia will not be sanctioned, that it will be recognized in writing that Colombia violated Ecuador’s sovereignty, and that the OAS will form a mission to analyze what happened.
**THE TIME LINE IN CONTEXT**

**March 7**
At the summit of the Rio Group, Colombia offers an apology in writing and commits to not violating the sovereignty of other countries again.

**March 8 and 10**
Correa considers the impasse with Colombia resolved, even though he reiterates that he does not forgive the aggression. He announces that he will re-establish relations with Colombia.

**March 17**
The XXV Meeting of Consultation of Ministers of Foreign Relations of the OAS.

**March 18**
Colombia urges an investigation into possible ties between Ecuador and the FARC.

**March 31**
Ecuador prosecutes Colombia in The Hague for its aerial fumigations.

**April 7**
OAS Good Offices Mission in Colombia and Ecuador.

**April 13**
President Correa makes public statements in Mexico in which he condemns the Colombian incursion and denies that the Colombian government would have known of the FARC’s presence on his territory.

**April 14**
The government of Colombia rejects President Correa’s statements and states that they have undermined the compromise reached with The Carter Center. President Correa announces that he will present a complaint against Colombia before the OAS over these statements.

**April 22**
The commanding officer of the Colombian military forces asks for the renewal of the efforts of the Binational Border Commission with Ecuador.

**April 29**
First meeting between the foreign ministers of Ecuador and Colombia under the auspices of the OAS.

**April 7–12**
OAS mission to both countries.

**April 17–18**
Second OAS Good Offices Mission in Colombia and Ecuador.

**April 2008**

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**TIME LINE OF THE BINATIONAL DIALOGUE GROUP**

**March 9–12**
Meetings between the BDG and the OAS delegation.

**March 17**
Meeting of the Ecuadorian group of the BDG.

**April 1–6**
The Carter Center conducts a confidential mediation exercise hoping to achieve the re-establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. The Center asks for the assistance of some of the BDG members to collaborate on the confidential exercise.

**April 26–29**
Third binational dialogue round between Colombia and Ecuador in Bogotá.
May 6–7
Ecuador discusses the possibility of summary executions during the Colombian military operation on March 1. Colomibia objects.

May 15
Interpol certifies that the three computers confiscated from the FARC base camp had not been tampered with.

May 21
In a meeting organized by the OAS, the military commands from both countries agree to re-establish on a temporary basis the Border Security Agreement.

May 27
Third meeting of the foreign ministers of Colombia and Ecuador under the auspices of the OAS.

May 29
The Ecuadorian foreign minister does not rule out the possibility of re-establishing diplomatic relations at the level of business envoys.

June 1
Ecuador drops the requirement for Colombian citizens to present a clear criminal background check (pasado judicial) to enter the country.

June 3 and 4
The presidents are presented with the letters from the BDG with 291 signatures from both countries.

June 6
Uribe and Correa, at President Carter's urging, agree to re-establish diplomatic relations "without preconditions. " Both countries and The Carter Center release press statements on the matter.

June 9
Fourth meeting of the foreign ministers of Colombia and Ecuador under the auspices of the OAS.

June 12
Binational forum on trade relations between Ecuador and Colombia, hosted by the Colombo-Ecuadorian Chamber of Industry and Commerce. Members of the BDG participate in this forum.

June 13
Correa pleads with the FARC to disarm.

June 19
Soccer match between Colombia and Ecuador. Members of the BDG participate in this forum.

June 20
Meeting of the Ecuadorian group of the BDG.

June 22
An interview with Correa appears in the publication "Página 12." He confirms the re-establishment of relations at the level of business envoys. He adds that "to establish full relations, we will demand a complete explanation of this attack."

June 23
The Colombian government suspends the re-establishment of relations in response to President Correa's interview in the publication "Página 12."

June 24
The Ecuadorian foreign ministry announces that it will not re-establish diplomatic relations for an indefinite time.
**The Carter Center**

**Binational Dialogue: Ecuador–Colombia**

**THE TIME LINE IN CONTEXT**

**June 25**
President Rafael Correa announces that relations with Colombia are suspended indefinitely.

**June 27**
President Uribe asks that Carter continue his mediation between the two countries.

**June 27**
A press statement by The Carter Center states that it "will continue working toward dialogue and improving the relations between the peoples of Colombia and Ecuador."

**July 2**
The Colombian army rescues Ingrid Betancourt, 11 soldiers, and three American hostages held by the FARC.

**July 18**
Colombian Foreign Minister Fernando Araujo resigns. Jaime Bermúdez takes over his position.

**August 16**
The foreign ministers of Colombia and Ecuador meet in Paraguay to discuss relations between the two countries, under the auspices of the OAS.

**August 20**
First meeting of Colombo-Ecuadorian Business Women, organized by the Women’s Foundation of Colombia. Three women from the BDG participate in the Business Women meeting.

**September 8**
Binational forum on development policies organized by the OAS, UNDP, and FLACSO. Two members of the BDG organized this forum, and two members served as presenters.

**September 16**
Meeting of the Ecuadorian group of the BDG.

**September 30**
Meeting of the Ecuadorian group of the BDG.

**September 29**
The new political constitution of Ecuador is approved by referendum.

**TIME LINE OF THE BINATIONAL DIALOGUE GROUP**

**June 25**
The BDG meets with President Alvaro Uribe. The BDG releases a statement in which it relays President Uribe’s support for its work.

**June 26**
The BDG meets with President Rafael Correa. It does not release a statement. President Correa reiterates his decision not to re-establish relations.

**June 25**
The Center’s informal evaluation with the BDG and the UNDP begins after the meetings with both presidents.

**June–September**
**2008**

**June 27**
The BDG meets with President Álvaro Uribe. The BDG releases a statement in which it relays President Uribe’s support for its work.

**June 26**
The BDG meets with President Rafael Correa. It does not release a statement. President Correa reiterates his decision not to re-establish relations.

**June 25**
The BDG meets with President Alvaro Uribe. The BDG releases a statement in which it relays President Uribe’s support for its work.

**June 25**
The BDG meets with President Alvaro Uribe. The BDG releases a statement in which it relays President Uribe’s support for its work.
October 13
Extraordinary summit of the CAN Session in Ecuador without President Uribe, who excuses himself, citing a lack of necessary conditions for the proper circumstances to attend.

October 22
The Ecuadorian president demands that the FARC immediately release one of his citizens being held hostage.

October 25–28
Verbal sparring match between the two presidents in their public statements. Ecuador announces that it may file a civil dispute with Colombia over lack of assistance for the case of an Ecuadorian hostage and may restrict the ability of Colombians to enter the country.

November 12
A Colombian paramilitary group almost crosses the border into Ecuador and wounds three Ecuadorians. In response, President Correa threatens to restrict the entry of Colombians into Ecuador.

November 23
José Valencia resigns as the foreign minister of Ecuador.

December 3
Ecuador reinstates the requirement for Colombian citizens to present a criminal background check (pasado judicial) to be able to enter the country.

December 12–15
Ecuadorian Foreign Minister María Isabel Salvador resigns and is replaced by Fander Falconi.
January 13
Galo Mora leaves the Ministry of Culture and assumes a position as the private secretary of President Correa.

January 23
Meeting between the Colombian BDG group and the International Verification Commission of the OAS.

February 9–10
Pasto forum on “Colombia-Ecuador: Building Political Bridges for Peace and Development on the Border” is sponsored by the UNDP, the OAS, and the National University of Colombia.

March 16
Meeting between the Ecuadorian BDG group and the International Verification Commission of the OAS.

March 19
Meeting between the BDG and President Correa.

January 23
Ecuador adopts restrictive measures on imports and avoids a deficit in its balance of payments.

January 24
Colombia expresses its interest in re-establishing relations and announces that it will be strengthening its military presence in the border zone.

January 28
Gustavo Larrea resigns as the minister of internal and external security to stand as an assembly member candidate. He later decides not to run.

February 1
The Ecuadorian foreign minister declines to attend the binational forum scheduled in Pasto.

February 4
José Ignacio Chauvin, a former official under former Minister Larrea, turns himself in to the attorney general, who has him under investigation for drug trafficking. He admits to having met with members of the FARC on numerous occasions.

February 9–10
Pasto forum on “Colombia-Ecuador: Building Political Bridges for Peace and Development on the Border” is sponsored by the UNDP, the OAS, and the National University of Colombia.

March 11
Meeting of the Ecuadorian group of the BDG.

March 16
Meeting between the Ecuadorian BDG group and the International Verification Commission of the OAS.

March 19
Meeting between the BDG and President Correa.

January 6
Lunch between the Ecuador BDG group and Socorro Ramírez.

January 14
Meeting of the Ecuadorian group of the BDG.
April 27
The BDG meets with President Carter.

April 28–29
President Carter meets with President Correa and the Ecuadorian foreign minister, who explain that they do not see signals that change the crisis situation between the two countries.

May 12 and 13
Concluding meeting of the first phase of the sixth round BDG in Bogotá.

April 8
Meeting of the Ecuadorian group of the BDG.

May 18
Colombian Minister of Defense Juan Manuel Santos resigns.

May 25
Meeting between Ecuadorian Minister of Health Caroline Chang and Colombian Minister of Social Protection Diego Palacio Betancourt to coordinate joint actions to address the H1N1 flu (promoted by a former member of the BDG, Angelino Garzón).

May 29
The U.S. Embassy in Ecuador denies that its government had anything to do with the events in Angostura.

June 9
Lunch between the Ecuadorian members of the Binational Dialogue Group.

June 11
The national general comptroller (PGE), representing the Ecuadorian government, presents an international claim against Colombia in Washington, D.C., before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights over the death of Ecuadorian citizen Aisalla during the Angostura bombing.

June 12
The Ecuadorian attorney general announces that the former Colombian minister of defense, Juan Manuel Santos, will be indicted for criminal proceedings in the Sucumbíos province.

June 16
Presentation of the book “Ecuador-Colombia: Building Bridges” (Edited by Grace Jaramillo).

June 17
Meeting between the Ecuadorian and Colombian Women’s Networks in the city of Pasto.

June 17
Colombian Minister of Foreign Relations Jaime Bermúdez reiterates that his government will present to the IACHR evidence of Aisalla’s ties to the FARC.

June 22
The Wall Street Journal publishes an opinion article in which it indicates that the Ecuadorian government had supported the FARC, for which Ecuador urges the publication to correct its statements.

June 29
A judge in Sucumbíos orders the arrest of former Colombian Defense Minister Juan Manuel Santos, who is accused of coordinating and ordering the attack on a FARC base camp in Angostura in March 2008.
**THE TIME LINE IN CONTEXT**

**July 8**
A group of Colombian attorneys presents charges to the Colombian attorney general against Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa and former Minister Gustavo Larrea, along with Ignacio Chauvin (recently released from jail), on accusations of maintaining ties with the FARC.

**July 13**
Ecuador imposes economic safeguarding restrictions on the importation of some Colombian products.

**July 17**
A video is released in which the second-ranking leader of the FARC, Jorge Bricelto, alias Mono Jojoy, confirms that the guerrilla group had provided financial support to Rafael Correa’s presidential campaign.

**July 22**
In light of the Ecuadorian safeguards, Colombia informally suspends the passage of Ecuadorian goods over their common border.

**July 29**
President Correa criticizes the possible signing of an agreement between Colombia and the United States to install military bases. President Uribe responds by denying that this initiative in the interest of security is a threat to neighboring countries.

**July 31**
OAS Secretary General José Miguel Insulza presents President Correa with the report of the OAS Verification Commission on the border between Ecuador and Colombia, urges Ecuador and Colombia to restore relations, and emphasizes that the problems between the two countries may require a longer amount of time to be resolved.

Ecuador’s ministers of government and foreign relations present copies of the presumed diary of Raul Reyes to the OAS and to the Ecuadorian attorney general, so that they can begin their respective examinations.

**August 9**
Based on a resolution by the CAN, the Ecuadorian economic safeguards are to apply to only a little more than 600 Colombian products, in new percentages.

**August 12**
Meeting between the Ecuadorian members of the Binational Dialogue Group.

**August 14**
Colombian President Alvaro Uribe announces his government’s willingness to initiate a dialogue to re-establish relations between Ecuador and Colombia and, once again, issues a public apology to the Ecuadorian government for the attack on the FARC base camp on Ecuadorian territory.

**August 15**
President Rafael Correa accepts this and says he is ready to have talks to restore diplomatic relations, on the condition that Colombia is willing to fulfill the commitments that it has not fulfilled.

**August 31**
Ecuadorian Minister of Foreign Affairs Fander Falconí announces that he will meet with his Colombian counterpart, Jaime Bermúdez, to establish a binational dialogue.

**August 14**
Meeting of the Colombian members of the Binational Dialogue Group.

**August 2009**

**TIME LINE OF THE BINATIONAL DIALOGUE GROUP**

**2009**
The Carter Center is an international non-governmental organization that specializes in peace building and conflict management following an approach known as Track 1.5 (Track 1 refers to governmental diplomacy and Track 2 to diplomacy between citizens or NGOs). This implies that the Center conducts its activities in an independent and autonomous manner, but it does so while maintaining direct contact with the governments in the countries in which it is active and with the North American government where it is headquartered. In this spirit, The Carter Center, along with the National Offices of the United Nations in Colombia and Ecuador, proposes to conduct an exercise of meetings and dialogue between a small group of Colombian citizens and a small group of Ecuadorian citizens, that would consist of four rounds of two days, to begin at the headquarters of The Carter Center in Atlanta on the next November 12 and 13, to be followed by a meeting in Bogotá and another in Quito—on dates to be determined by the group—and to be concluded with a final meeting in Atlanta on May 19 and 20 of the following year.

The general characteristics of the exercise are described below.

The objective of the exercise is to help to create a balanced, open, and safe environment for meetings and dialogue between this small group of citizens from both countries, in order to work together to identify and promote new “leverage for positive change” in bilateral relations, in the form of both influence on public perception and possible concrete actions within their own spheres of action and influence.

The members of both groups will be citizens without decision-making ability at the government level who will not be in any way committing their governments when they speak, but some of them will have easy and direct access to their governments, some will be trusted by the acting decision makers, and others will have the ability to impact public opinion in their country. The groups will be high level and diverse in background, representing the richness of both societies, and the exercise will serve to help establish bonds not only between Ecuadorians and Colombians but also within each national group.

The invitation to the participants will be offered directly by former President Carter, and the list of invitees will be circulated to the highest authorities of both countries to solicit their feedback, exchange opinions, and keep them informed. The Carter Center and the offices of the United Nations in each country will write the lists of potential participants and will arrange the necessary meetings for the task until they secure two evenly matched groups between 6 and 10 persons from each country.

The political purpose of the exercise is to help to open up a space that has not existed in bilateral relations, that would be noncommitted and outside the public eye, but that would be potentially useful for exploring and implementing initiatives that would contribute to mutual understanding, to the production of mutually positive public images, and to the promotion of coordinated joint policies, if appropriate.

The dynamic of the meetings will be highly participative, with open and confidential conversations facilitated by the experts from The Carter Center and the UNDP, beginning with an overview of all of the different perceptions that currently dominate bilateral relations, identifying the positive elements that can be expanded and the negative ones to be addressed.

The definitive agenda of topics to be addressed by the group and the methodology for approaching
them will be the central objective of the first meeting so that the same group will make those decisions together. This agenda will be developed in the following meetings. In the two meetings in Atlanta, former President Jimmy Carter will participate, and at the meetings in Quito and Bogotá, the group will decide together on each occasion whether or not to open the meetings to include other local actors.

The expected product of the four rounds will be a joint report that describes the unfolding of the process and, if the group so decides, a set of joint Recommendations (confidential or public, according to the group’s decision).

Francisco Diez
Representative
The Carter Center in Latin America
Considering the pressures facing both governments from the international agenda, including Correa’s trip to Mexico, the European Union summit in Lima on April 15, the CAN summit in May which will be hosted by Colombia, and finally the OAS General Assembly meeting in June in Medellín, we propose to President Correa:

1. Agree to a “truce on negative or inflammatory public statements about the other country” for 10 days and give a chance to the informal, unofficial, and discreet efforts of The Carter Center with the support of the Binational Dialogue Group.

2. Form a working group with four members from the binational group — two Ecuadorians plus Villegas and Ocampo from Colombia — so that during those 10 days they can work productively with Vice Foreign Minister Valencia and Vice Foreign Minister Reyes in order to identify small steps and possible signs for both governments to build confidence, along with the essential conditions for re-establishing diplomatic relations.

3. I will present these ideas to Foreign Minister Salvador tomorrow and later to President Correa and will return by midday on Wednesday to Bogotá to discuss their suggestions or concerns with you.

4. If we make progress and they accept our proposed steps for proceeding, I would ask that you arrange a possible meeting with President Uribe on Wednesday afternoon or Thursday morning to match the input from Correa.

5. If President Uribe agrees, I will immediately notify Quito and finally President Carter; between Thursday and Friday I will speak with both presidents to solidify the procedural agreement.

6. The Carter Center will provide technical support to the binational working group, and can arrange for additional support from the OAS or U.N. if both governments consider it necessary.
Considering the pressures facing both governments from the international agenda, including Correa’s trip to Mexico, the European Union summit in Lima on April 15, the CAN summit in May which will be hosted by Colombia, and finally the OAS General Assembly meeting in June in Medellín, we propose that both presidents:

Agree that “there will not be negative public statements” made by high-ranking officials in both governments for 10 days (from April 4 to 14) and that during this period an informal, unofficial, and discreet negotiating effort by The Carter Center and the Binational Dialogue Group will begin.

The initiative consists of:

1. Immediately form a working group with four members from the binational group, two Ecuadorians and two Colombians,\(^43\) so that, with the Carter Center’s support, they can work productively with Vice Foreign Minister Valencia of Ecuador and Vice Foreign Minister Reyes of Colombia in order to identify possible small steps for both governments to establish some level of mutual confidence.

2. The group will draft a single written document that identifies immediate, concrete, and specific signs that one side can send to the other that could be read as gestures of good will.

3. If these signs are sent, the group can make progress on identifying the minimum necessary conditions for re-establishing diplomatic relations.

4. The government of Ecuador considers this a viable initiative, and it has appointed Minister Salvador to monitor it. In the same way, President Uribe approves of it and has appointed Foreign Minister Araujo.

5. Former President Carter spoke with both presidents to solidify the procedural agreement and establish their commitment to avoiding negative statements about one another.

6. The entire exercise will remain confidential. If it makes progress, it could be of additional assistance to the OAS mission or agree upon whatever other format that the governments consider appropriate.

\(^{43}\) Luis Carlos Villegas and Augusto Ramírez Ocampo will participate from the Colombian group, and for the Ecuadorian group the government suggested Adrián Bonilla and Galo Mora.
APPENDIX E

Final Document on Signals

APPROVED BY QUITO AND BOGOTÁ
April 7, 2008

A. Reciprocal signals for both governments
A formal statement by the presidency in honor of the visit by the OAS mission indicating that the government ratifies in all its terms its support for the resolution adopted by that organism at the Foreign Ministers meeting on March 17, ratifying its observance of its content and hoping that it will contribute to the process of normalizing diplomatic relations between the two countries. The statement will also indicate that the President has instructed the officials in his administration that only the Head of State and the Minister of Foreign Relations will make public statements or demonstrations with respect to relations with the other country, in order to keep a united front and to avoid creating perceptions that would affect the work of the OAS Mission.
Date: Quito and Bogotá will issue this on Monday the 7th when the OAS Mission begins in Ecuador.
Execution is the responsibility of each Foreign Ministry.

B. Signals from Bogotá to Quito
1. A verbal message from the Colombian government to the Ecuadorian government to be delivered by the Carter Center’s representative to President Rafael Correa, conveying his immediate willingness to renew diplomatic relations as soon as Ecuador will arrange it. Date: Monday April 7 at a meeting with President Correa at 12:30 pm. Execution is the responsibility of Francisco Diez.
2. A Diplomatic Note offering technical assistance and humanitarian aid from the government of Colombia and the Agency for Disaster Prevention to the government and people of Ecuador in light of the emergency situation caused by the intense rainfall that has inundated the neighboring country with floods. Date: This will be made public in Colombia on Tuesday April 8 and in the next hour a statement by the Foreign Ministry of Ecuador will announce and accept the offer with gratitude. Execution is the responsibility of the Foreign Ministry. This signal will be met with a response on the same day through the signal from Quito listed in point C.1. on the process of repatriating detained Colombian persons.

3. A Diplomatic Note from the Foreign Ministry that expresses the Colombian government’s belief—despite the current state of affairs and the filing of a claim before The Hague, which should be resolved according to international law—that bilateral relations can be channeled (as shown in the recent example between Chile and Peru: see the statement by Chile’s Minister of Foreign Relations) along a path of cooperation in the interests of their respective peoples, emphasizing that, specifically and immediately, Colombia will make an effort so that both governments can coordinate their cooperation in the diverse multilateral environments which they share, because it is very important for its government to work together with the government of Ecuador for the benefit of the region. Specifically it proposes to coordinate the work of the units from the CAN, UNASUR, and OAS that they are planning for the time being through early June of this year. The Diplomatic Note will be made public in Colombia as soon as it is sent. Date: Tuesday April 8. Execution is the responsibility of the Foreign Ministry. This signal will be met with a response on the same day through the signal from Quito listed in point C.2. on the claim before The Hague.
4. A Diplomatic Note in response to the note sent by the Foreign Ministry of Ecuador on April 3, with respect to sending the information found
on the computers of Raúl Reyes, that expresses
the Colombian government’s commitment to
sharing the information according to the terms
requested by Ecuador (in a digital format, with
information on the software and hardware, etc.)
immediately after it is verified by INTERPOL.
Likewise, it will indicate that Colombia will invite
a team of Ecuadorian technical experts sent by the
Ecuadorian government to visit Bogotá in order
to receive all of the necessary information and
instructions on the technical process that was used,
and to carry out a physical inspection of the com-
puters. In addition Colombia is open to the partici-
pation of police consultants from other countries
during the inspection process as well as the attend-
dance of INTERPOL to provide any information
to facilitate the process. Date: Wednesday April
9. Execution is the responsibility of the Foreign
Ministry. On the same day this signal will be met
with a response in the form of the signal from
Quito listed in point C.3. on the rejection of crimi-
nal groups and their tactics.

5. A Diplomatic Note from the Foreign Ministry
formally extending an invitation from the Foreign
Minister of Colombia to the Minister of Culture
of Ecuador to participate in the release ceremony
for Professor Socorro Ramírez’s book “Mirada
al Ecuador” (“A Look at Ecuador”), to be held
on Monday April 21 at 10 am at the Foreign
Ministry’s headquarters. The book reflects the
professor’s work at the Diplomatic Academy
(Academia Diplomática) called “Que Colombia
conozca al Ecuador” (“That Colombia May
Know Ecuador”) and includes essays by various
Ecuadorians. Date: The invitation will be made
public in Bogotá on Friday April 11. Execution is
the responsibility of the Foreign Ministry. On the
same day this signal will be met with a response in
the form of the signal from Quito listed in point
C.4. on the invitation to a Minister from Colombia
to the joint event to be held by FLACSO and the
Ecuadorian Ministry of Culture.

6. A public announcement by the Colombian
Minister of Agriculture at the National Rice
Council, confirming the Colombian government’s
decision to authorize the purchase of a substantial
amount of tons of rice from Ecuador during the
first quarter and an expected continuation of pur-
chases through the second quarter. An immediate
announcement by the ANDI Chamber of Rice that
it will arrange the purchase offer with Ecuador,
including an invitation to Ecuador’s Vice Minister
of Agriculture to travel to Bogotá to begin talks on
the subject. Date: Tuesday April 8. Execution is
the responsibility of ANDI and its President.

Signals from Quito to Bogotá

1. A Diplomatic Note from the Deputy Secretary
of Consular Services of the Ecuadorian Foreign
Ministry to the Colombian Consulate in Quito,
informing them that the competent Ecuadorian
authorities have decided to initiate, as soon as
possible and for humanitarian reasons, the process
of repatriation for persons of Colombian nation-
ality who are being held in Ecuadorian prisons,
and that it hopes to conclude this process in a
few short weeks. It will also include the plan to
request that the Ecuadorian Consulate in Bogotá
arrange for the repatriation of the Ecuadorians
being held in Colombian prisons, in accordance
with the binding bilateral agreements between the
two countries. Date: Monday April 7, 6:00 pm. A
press release by the Foreign Ministry of Ecuador
on Tuesday the 8th at 11:00 am will announce
the letter. Execution is the responsibility of the
Foreign Ministry. On the same day this signal will
be met with a response in the form of the signal
from Bogotá listed in point B.2. on assistance for
weather-related disaster.

2. A public statement or comment by a high-ranking
official in the Foreign Ministry on the dispute
in the Hague, commenting on Colombia’s press
statement from B.4., indicating that Ecuador will
observe whatever the Court decides in accordance
with international law and explaining that in any
legal process there is always the possibility of an
extrajudicial arrangement that satisfies the needs
of both parties and that it should not be ruled out
3. A public statement by Foreign Minister María Isabel Salvador noting the vicissitudes (the highly probable failure) of the French mission for Ingrid Betancourt (or in the event of her highly unlikely release) condemning the use of kidnapping and the actions of violent and irregular groups against defenseless citizens, both in Colombia and in any part of the world and ratifying Ecuador’s firm resolve not to allow the activities of these criminal groups on Ecuadorian territory. (Reiterating the statements reported in El Expreso in which she says that the FARC “are a violent and irregular group whose tactics we categorically reject.”) Date: Wednesday April 9, 11:00 am. Execution is the responsibility of the Foreign Ministry. On the same day this signal will be met with a response in the form of the signal from Bogotá listed in point B.4. on cooperation in multilateral environments.

4. A Diplomatic Note from the Foreign Ministry issuing an invitation from the Foreign Minister to the Colombian Minister of ....................... to participate in the event jointly organized with FLACSO Ecuador on ................... to be held in the month of April. Date: the invitation will be made public in Quito on Friday April 11. Execution is the responsibility of the Foreign Ministry. On the same day this signal will be met with a response in the form of the signal from Bogotá listed in point B.5. on inviting Galo Mora to the release party for Socorro Ramírez’s book on April 21.

5. The national government of Ecuador will arrange a meeting of local authorities from the border region to carry out a joint public exercise in which the government representatives will emphasize the importance of cooperation for their respective peoples and will urge the governments to return to the path of cooperation outlined by the projects of the ZIF (Border Integration Zone). Date: the activity will be planned for the week of April 14 so that the invitation can be finalized as soon as possible to arrange the exercise during the month of April. The initiative and Colombia’s acceptance of it will be announced during the week of April 14. Execution is the responsibility of the Foreign Ministry.

Procedural Disclaimer
In the event that one of the small steps for sending the signals listed here is delayed, or its execution is complicated for any reason, both parties agree to inform the members of the Binational Dialogue Group that are supporting this exercise, Dr. Augusto Ramírez Ocampo in Colombia and Dr. Adrián Bonilla in Ecuador, as soon as possible so that they can facilitate communication between the Vice Foreign Ministers and agree on whatever changes are necessary. The Carter Center will also be available at any time.
In light of the press communiqués issued in recent days by the governments of Ecuador and Colombia, mentioning The Carter Center, we offer the following clarification:

Ecuador President Rafael Correa and Colombia President Álvaro Uribe had several phone conversations with former U.S. President Jimmy Carter during the last week of March. After those conversations, the Carter Center’s staff facilitated an exchange of confidential and low-profile messages between the two governments. They made some small confidential agreements, confirmed by both presidents to President Carter last week. The Carter Center’s role has been to facilitate conversations. As an impartial third party, The Carter Center is not authorized to reveal the content of the conversations that occurred. Both governments have reasserted their desire to continue receiving the Carter Center’s support.
Appendix G
Conclusions from the Third Binational Dialogue Round Ecuador–Colombia

Summary

Letter to the Presidents
As a concrete final result, the Group agreed to commit to collecting signatures from relevant influential people from both countries to support an identical letter to be sent to both President Uribe and President Correa, urging them to re-establish diplomatic relations in the interest of moving forward with the initiatives that they had agreed upon previously. It decided that each member of the Group will attempt to obtain at least 10 signatures and it agreed on the following text:

Most excellent Presidents
Of the Republic of Colombia and the Republic of Ecuador
Álvaro Uribe and Rafael Correa

The women and men who have signed below allow us to respectfully address you to express our concern over the course taken by the relations between the two governments, which affects the historic brotherhood between our two peoples.

Therefore, and without failing to recognize the legitimate differences that exist, we would like to ask that you make all necessary efforts to restore diplomatic relations between both countries as soon as possible.

Documentaries
It also plans to create two short documentaries, one from the Colombian point of view using archive materials on the sensitivity that surrounds the issue of the FARC and the other from the Ecuadorian point of view on the sensitivity regarding the issue of sovereignty, inviting different figures to comment on the issue.

Evaluation of the Dialogue
The participants conducted an evaluation of the dialogue up to this point, based on a structured survey developed by the PRDD of the UNDP, which revealed a high level of support for the idea of continuing the dialogue process over the long term. They agreed to plan an agenda of concrete issues for the second phase of dialogue, after the meeting in Atlanta, which will include seminars, meetings, and open dialogues.

Elevation of the Group’s abilities
During this meeting we saw a decisive yet intangible result. The group itself changed in this meeting, as it showed an openness and a level of understanding of one another’s perspective that are capable of stimulating internal changes within each one of the participants. Thanks to the clear contributions by the Ecuadorian members, the Colombian members were able to understand the views and feelings held by the Ecuadorian people with respect to territory, sovereignty, and national dignity. Similarly, thanks to the honesty and transparency of the Colombian members from diverse ideological backgrounds (from Rafael Nieto, an intellectual who is very close to President Uribe, to Antonio Navarro Wolff, a former guerrilla member of M19 who is now the Governor of the Department of Nariño, which borders Ecuador), the Ecuadorian members were able to understand the feelings shared by the Colombian people with respect to the barbarity of violence, the FARC, drug trafficking and the paramilitaries, and the imperative need for the people to achieve security and peace.
Appendix H
Press Release, June 6, 2008

ECUADOR AND COLOMBIA PRESIDENTS ACCEPT PRESIDENT CARTER’S PROPOSAL TO RENEW DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS AT THE LEVEL OF CHARGÉ D’AFFAIRES, IMMEDIATELY AND WITHOUT PRECONDITIONS

June 6, 2008
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The founder of The Carter Center and Nobel Peace Prize winner Jimmy Carter, together with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), have supported the work of a dialogue group composed of distinguished citizens from Ecuador and Colombia to improve relations between the two countries since September 2007.

In the context of this initiative and taking into account the events that happened on March 1, 2008, President Carter has communicated several times with Presidents Rafael Correa Delgado of Ecuador and Álvaro Uribe Vélez of Colombia and has coordinated his good offices with the Secretary-General of the Organization of American States (OAS) José Miguel Insulza.

In his most recent telephone conversations, President Carter consulted each president about the possibility of renewing diplomatic relations between the two countries immediately and without preconditions, initially at the level of chargé d’affaires. The re-establishment of diplomatic relations will also contribute to the confidence-building initiatives led by the OAS and the efforts of both countries to renew cooperative mechanisms to address the common problems they face.

Today, both presidents confirmed their willingness to do so immediately through their respective foreign ministries.

A not-for-profit, nongovernmental organization, The Carter Center has helped to improve life for people in more than 70 countries by resolving conflicts; advancing democracy, human rights, and economic opportunity; preventing diseases; improving mental health care; and teaching farmers in developing nations to increase crop production. The Carter Center was founded in 1982 by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and his wife, Rosalynn, in partnership with Emory University, to advance peace and health worldwide.
Appendix I

Press Release, June 27, 2008

Carter Center to Continue Ecuador–Colombia Reconciliation Efforts

June 27, 2008

For Immediate Release

The Carter Center will continue working for dialogue and the improvement of the relationship between the people of Colombia and Ecuador and remains ready to collaborate with both governments in the manner the presidents deem to be most appropriate and opportune.

The Carter Center fully respects the sovereign decisions of both governments. Its initiatives to promote the re-establishment of diplomatic relations, including recent meetings of the Binational Dialogue Group with the presidents of Ecuador and Colombia, were fully consulted and expressly approved by both governments.

The Center recognizes that conditions are not currently conducive to continue offering its good offices to Colombia and Ecuador’s national authorities for the re-establishment of diplomatic relations but asserts that efforts by citizens and other interested actors to bring the two countries and their people together are relevant and needed.

For the past year, The Carter Center has worked to improve the bilateral relationship between Colombia and Ecuador. The Center organized, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Program, a binational dialogue process between interested citizens of Ecuador and Colombia and promoted a series of activities and initiatives, many of which do not depend upon national authorities, to bring the two countries closer together. Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, together with the Binational Dialogue Group, sought to support both governments through direct communication with their presidents and foreign ministers in the process to re-establish diplomatic relations.

A not-for-profit, nongovernmental organization, The Carter Center has helped to improve life for people in more than 70 countries by resolving conflicts; advancing democracy, human rights, and economic opportunity; preventing diseases; improving mental health care; and teaching farmers in developing nations to increase crop production. The Carter Center was founded in 1982 by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and his wife, Rosalynn, in partnership with Emory University, to advance peace and health worldwide.
Appendix J

Agreements Reached During the Meeting in Quito

BINATIONAL DIALOGUE GROUP COLOMBIA–ECUADOR

November 6 and 7, 2008

The Binational Dialogue Group Colombia–Ecuador evaluated the current internal context in each country as well as the panorama affecting binational relations and reached consensus on the following decisions:

**Timeframe:** They decided to adopt an operating strategy lasting from November 2008 through April/May of 2009 (or until after the general elections in Ecuador, whenever they’re held) and to hold the final scheduled meeting of this phase of the BDG after that date. The BDG decided to postpone its activities until this next meeting and to then evaluate what the next steps should be based on the context.

**Methods of Operation:** It was decided that the BDG will operate using an air of discretion, in order to ensure self-preservation in the event of a possible increase in tensions between the governments, but it will move forward with the initiatives defined here and will show its work in pursuit of a middle ground that can make the accomplishments, background, and opinions of its members visible.

**Initiatives:** It agreed to pursue several concrete activities under the leadership of certain members as described in the table included below.

**Contributions:** The members of the BDG expressed their interest in continuing to receive the support of The Carter Center, the CAF, and the UNDP for this phase. The UNDP, in an agreement with The Carter Center, will conduct an evaluation process of the initiative and will determine the extent of its contributions for the future. The CC ratified its commitment to the initiative and agreed to speak with the CAF about delaying the approved financial backing. The CAF explicitly offered its support to the Group during the lunch it shared with its Director.

**Responsibilities:** To complete the agreed upon activities, some of the BDG members decided to take on specific responsibilities.
### INITIATIVES

**Academic Forum in Pasto**  
(planning underway for 11/18-19)

**Private Meeting for Influential Entrepreneurs from both countries**  
(Will replace the ANDI–CORPEI forum scheduled in Guayaquil)

**A Visit by the Peace Commission of the Chamber of Representatives of Colombia to the Foreign Relations Commission of the Legislation and Oversight Commission of Ecuador**

**Electronic alerts**  
Mini studies with a central question. The first will be on “What are the costs of not having relations?” The studies should be seen as a warning signal.

**Media**

1. The members of the BDG will continue to write documents, articles, commentaries, and documentaries.
2. Possible meeting at “El Tiempo” between journalists from both countries about specific topics (for example the global financial crisis).
3. A media blog (an initiative produced in the last binational meeting).

**Security**

1. Establish academic forums in both countries to address the issue. Explore the discreet initiative by FLACSO Ecuador that brings together military, civil, and police authorities with Colombian counterparts to meet for a day of dialogue about the topic.  
   Explore funding for a project in this area.  
   Raise awareness.
2. A visit by the BDG members to military detachments at the border and dialogue with Ecuadorian military leaders (invitation from Minister Ponce)

**Exploration of a possible binational meeting between workers’ unions**

**Colombian Academic Department in Ecuador**

Incorporate prior experience gained through FLACSO.  
Explore this with the National Institute of Higher Education (Instituto de Altos Estudios Nacionales, IAEN).

**Publication of a book with a contribution from each one of the members of the BDG describing the experience of this dialogue.**
Appendix K

Sixth Meeting of the Binational Dialogue Group

Bogotá, May 12 and 13, 2009

Below is a list of the principal decisions agreed upon by the BDG:

Timeframe: The BDG decided that the next three months would be transitional and that it should focus on defining the second phase of work (as well as developing a project to obtain the necessary resources).

The legacy of the first phase of work: During the final stages of the first phase of work, the BDG should share the experiences they had and the lessons they gained. This devolution could be accomplished through a publication about the experience they underwent. The publication could be announced through a presentation attended by the media and featuring a panel of BDG members who could elaborate on their experience.

Vision for the future: It is important not to abandon the initiative underway and to begin a second phase of work. New members should be incorporated in this new phase, taking into account the needs of the binational agenda. The BDG should continue to meet periodically. The BDG decided “to keep the warning sign lit” to fulfill a preventive role in the event of whatever critical situation may come to pass for the relations between Ecuador and Colombia. It also agreed on the need to continue monitoring the process to identify possible windows of opportunity and wield its influence, reframing the bad habit of maintaining the status quo.

Profile: The BDG has a public profile. It should try to influence public opinion more to build awareness of the consequences of the disruption of diplomatic relations between Ecuador and Colombia, especially on the border communities.

Initiatives: They agreed to promote several concrete activities to be led by specific members, organized by different sectors: i) influence on the governments, ii) influence on public opinion, iii) influence on the local level (border zone), and iv) influence on the international level. They also suggested reviewing the proposed activities for the first phase of work that were not able to be completed up to this point.
PRESS STATEMENT

COLOMBIA–ECUADOR BINATIONAL DIALOGUE GROUP

Quito and Bogotá, May 15, 2009

The Colombia–Ecuador Binational Dialogue Group, with the support of The Carter Center and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), met in the city of Bogotá on May 12 and 13 for the sixth time in the year and a half it has been working, in order to celebrate the conclusion of its first phase of work focused on promoting the positive agenda between Colombia and Ecuador.

1. The Binational Dialogue Group wants to express on the record its deep satisfaction over the repeated gestures of friendship and closeness between the peoples of our two nations, especially from those situated in the border region.

2. Based on its own experiences the Group stresses the importance of dialogue for overcoming differences and promoting mutual understanding. We believe it is urgent that we learn and understand the other’s perspective and identify and find solutions to the large and small problems that we face in our bilateral relations: border development, the regional and international outlook, questions of security, the state of public opinion in both countries and diplomatic relations at the government level.

3. In this sense, the Binational Dialogue Group once again calls upon the governments of Colombia and Ecuador to reinitiate direct contact that will allow them to process their differences and reestablish diplomatic relations. We reiterate our commitment to contributing to this from the respective fields to which we pertain, but we understand that it is the governments that should take steps toward normalizing relations.

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<tr>
<th>FROM COLOMBIA</th>
<th>FROM ECUADOR</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ricardo Ávila</td>
<td>Adrián Bonilla</td>
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<td>Claudia Gurisatti</td>
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<td>Antonio Navarro Wolff</td>
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<td>Rafael Nieto Loaiza</td>
<td>Manuel Chiriboga</td>
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<td>Socorro Ramírez</td>
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<td>Augusto Ramírez Ocampo</td>
<td>Patricia Estupiñán</td>
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<td>Sandra Suárez</td>
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<td>Luz María Sierra</td>
<td>Gonzalo Ruiz</td>
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<td>Luis Carlos Villegas</td>
<td>Pedro Velasco</td>
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Appendix L

Modifications to Road Map

Draft 2 — July 23, 2009

This draft document's sole objective is to serve as a foundation for a direct conversation between the Ministers of Foreign Relations of the two countries scheduled to take place in Lima on July 24. As a modification of the Road Map proposed on the past June 23, we propose the following to both parties:

1. Confirm the validity of all of the points of agreement reached with the assistance of former President Jimmy Carter in Atlanta and consolidated on the past June 2.

2. Commit to holding a new Foreign Minister’s meeting in Atlanta, at a date that also works for former President Jimmy Carter, within the next 3–4 weeks.

3. From this point on through the date of the meeting in Atlanta, with the assistance of the Carter Center staff, write a Draft text of a Joint Press Statement to be released at the conclusion of the meeting in Atlanta in a special program on CNN and the rest of the press featuring both Foreign Ministers, announcing:
   a) The resumption of direct talks intended to re-establish diplomatic relations between the two countries. It will include the decision to re-establish relations at the level of charge d'affaires after the date XXXXXX.
   b) The statements that have already been agreed upon in language similar to the following:
      i) Colombia reiterates its commitment not to conduct future operations on Ecuadorian territory without being sure of the full cooperation and approval of the government of Ecuador.
      ii) Ecuador reiterates that its government will not tolerate the presence of armed irregular groups seeking refuge on its territory and that any type of armed incursion will be repelled, if necessary by force.
   c) The formation of three Working Commissions that will be charged with fine tuning the agreements that both parties need to draft with respect to: Security and Control of Criminal Activity, Border Development and Refugees, Other Pending Issues (in which we would include any new issues that require agreement). We should be able to negotiate the integration and the operating methods of these Working Commissions so that they can be included in this announcement. We should also determine the extent of the assistance from the OAS on some of these Commissions.

4. In order to address the new issues they want to include in these talks and move forward on the preparations for the Atlanta meeting, The Carter Center offers the assistance of its team to serve as mediators and participate in joint meetings (for example in Asunción) and/or act as a “go-between” traveling back and forth between each capital and working on a single text.
Appendix M

Joint Communiqué Ecuador—Colombia

New York, September 24

1. The Governments of Ecuador and Colombia have begun a process of direct negotiations with the intention to re-establish normal diplomatic relations.

2. In this sense, the Presidents have given instructions to their respective Foreign Ministers, so that in the month of October of the present year, the designation of the charges d'affaires will be set at first instance.

3. The Government of Colombia reiterates its commitment that there will be no military or defense operations on Ecuadorian territory.

4. The Government of Ecuador reiterates that its government will not tolerate the presence of Colombian irregular or illegal armed groups in its territory and that any such incursion will be repelled, by force if necessary.

5. The two governments will propose the mechanisms in order to better the humanitarian situation of Colombian citizens living in Ecuador as refugees. Colombia, and other nations, will provide appropriate support, in funds and services, for the refugees from Colombia now living in Ecuador.

6. The Governments of Ecuador and Colombia have committed to reactivating the Bi-national Border Commission and to broadening coordination and communication mechanisms between civil authorities, military, and police. The Government of Colombia will continue to carry out all its necessary efforts to maintain its effective presence along the common border zone.

7. The legal issues submitted to the competent international organizations will not be an item of discussion during this process of negotiations, unless the two parties agree upon its discussion.

8. Colombia manifests that it does not recognize Ecuador’s judicial extraterritorial jurisdiction to investigate and to try Colombian government officials or Colombian ex-government officials. The Government of Ecuador manifests its recognition of the independence of State Functions, and respects and complies with the rules and processes that take place under the Judicial Function within the national territory and among the international rules of jurisdiction and authority.

9. Both Governments have agreed to request the assistance of The Carter Center and the Organization of American States in order to tackle the public demands of Ecuador and Colombia. For this, a deadline of fifteen days was set for the creation of special working commissions dedicated to develop, and if possible, to solve the issues presented by the two countries, in reference to:

a) Security and Control of Crime: so that within the capacity of both nations, it may be possible to better security, and combat the trafficking of drugs, violence, and criminal acts committed along the common border.

b) Border Development: so that plans and projects of development for the common border can be organized jointly.

c) Sensitive Issues: so that both sides’ demands may be discussed in order to normalize diplomatic relations.

10. The Governments of Colombia and Ecuador recognize the importance of advancing a positive agenda and have agreed to reactivate the Neighborhood Commissions. Both sides value
their ties of brotherhood in manifesting their will to construct a new bilateral relation, based on mutual respect and effective collaboration for the development of their respective potential, the fight against common threats, and the consolidation of peace.

11. A special thanks to The Carter Center and the Organization of American States for their efforts and collaboration during the process of rapprochement to normalizing relations between the two countries.