



ENLHY-77

The Hague, 25 June 2018

Ms. Shula Rijxman
Chairwoman
Nederlandse Publieke Omroep
Hilversum

Ref.: 2018 FIFA World Cup Russia – Live transmission of the match Poland vs. Colombia

Dear Ms. Rijxman,

Acting with instructions from my Government, I would like to refer to the comments during the transmission of the match between Poland and Colombia on 24 June during the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia. This match was broadcasted in The Netherlands by the Dutch TV station NPO1, whose parent company is NPO.

I have to bring to your attention the regrettable statements made by the journalists Hugo Borst and Henry Schout during the transmission of the match. In the aftermath of the game, the journalists made derogatory remarks about the Colombian fans who were present at the match and went as far as suggesting that their travel to Russia and their attendance of the match could have been possible only because of the money connected to drugs-trafficking.

I want to let you know that hundreds of fellow Colombians have reached this Embassy to convey their anger and discomfort about these irresponsible, biased, unfunded and denigrating comments, clearly based on stereotypes and lack of knowledge and respect for our nation.

The truth is that drug-trafficking and drug traffickers do not fairly represent Colombia or the Colombian people. They operate internationally and have different nationalities because as we all know the world drug problem is the result of consumption patterns and the actions of international criminal organizations that manage to break the law and the borders all over the world, in all countries, both developed and developing, despite the great effort that countries like Colombia do to prevent and combat this crime.

Despite this negative stereotype, Colombians are characterized by being hardworking and committed. Colombian middle class has grown remarkably in the last

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years, driving demand and consumption. It rose from 16.3% in 2002 to 31.1% in 2016. Likewise, for the fifth year in a row, Colombia has an unemployment rate below 2 digits, closing 2017 at 9.4%.

Colombian economy is thriving and sustainable. In 2017, Colombian GDP grew 1.8%, more than the average growth for Latin America and the Caribbean (1.2%). The International Monetary Fund (IMF) forecasts that the Colombian economy will grow by 2.7% in 2018 with an upward trend.

We have managed to increase the investment rate in our economy at the highest levels in history and at the highest levels in all Latin America. In 2017, Colombia registered USD 14,518 million of inward FDI, an increase of 4.8% compared to the FDI registered during 2016.

Our tourist sector is passing through an outstanding moment. International tourist arrivals in Colombia grew by 28.2% in 2017. Only in this year 6,531,226 foreigners visited our country. On the other hand, now Colombians can enter more than 80 territories without visa, including Russia and most of the European countries. The visa waiver reflects the progress we have made over the last few years which is clearly recognized around the world.

The visa waiver to Russia has allowed many Colombians to travel to support the Colombian national football team during the current World Cup and enjoy this event that motivates very positively millions around the world, from all nationalities. Colombians enjoy the sport and I am sure they would have enjoyed seeing the Dutch team competing, since it has always been highly regarded in our country, well known as the "Clockwork Orange".

It was thus simply natural for Colombians living in this country to find the words aired on your Station, in particular those used by Mr. Borst, both striking and offensive.

I would like to stress that Colombia does not question the freedom of speech or the independence of journalists. What we demand is that journalists perform their functions and exercise their rights in a responsible manner and with due respect for the obligations they entail, including the duty to respect the dignity of any given country and its citizens.

Yours sincerely,


JUAN JOSÉ QUINTANA
Ambassador