

Andean Report by Diana Olaya de Terán

López Michelsen is back!

Colombia's narco-terrorists continue to murder and blackmail, while the government pursues its "peace talks."

Ruling Liberal Party president and former Colombian head of state Alfonso López Michelsen has resurfaced in the political arena, this time as a government-appointed "mediator" in peace talks with the narco-terrorist guerrilla forces still at large.

López's most memorable, and infamous, appearance was in 1984, when he met at the Marriott Hotel in Panama with the heads of the Colombian cocaine cartels, just one week after cartel hitmen assassinated Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla. López, who claims he was merely listening to "their side of the story," in fact conveyed the cartels' demand for a political amnesty in exchange for paying the Colombian foreign debt, to then-President Belisario Betancur. From then on, "The Godfather," as López came to be known, has represented the interests of the drug cartels and their terrorist junior partners.

López's current role as "peace negotiator" is hardly new. In 1990, he headed the so-called "Group of Notables," which served to negotiate a plea-bargain offer by the Gaviria government to the cartel chieftains, all in the name of peace. The result of that effort is that a handful of drug lords are passing the time in gilded bunkers, provided at government expense, while the drug trade continues to prosper.

On Oct. 1, members of one of the groups of the so-called Simón Bolívar Guerrilla Coordinator (CNGSB) ambushed a motorcade of former Senate president and Cauca Valley senatorial candidate Aurelio Iragorri Hormaza. Iragorri miraculously survived the at-

tack, but seven others, including five bodyguards, a former mayor, and another civilian, were killed.

The Gaviria government responded to widespread outrage following the attack by suspending the "peace dialogues" that were ongoing in Caracas with the CNGSB's chieftains. Gaviria said that "just as millions of Colombians have demanded, dialogue with the guerrilla organizations must be carried out under minimal détente conditions. Dialogue with the terrorists is clearly and simply impossible at this time."

Colombians breathed a sigh of relief at the expectation that the government would finally put an end to the farce of peace talks with the murderous narco-terrorists. But presidential "peace adviser" Jesús Antonio Bejarano quickly clarified: "The peace dialogues have not been terminated; only suspended."

The narco-guerrillas responded with self-righteous indignation to the government's suspension of the talks, calling the move "arrogant and hasty" and "fickle." They threatened that only a bilateral cease-fire could provide for secure congressional elections on Oct. 27. Even as the CNGSB protested, however, the assaults continued. A military patrol was ambushed with dynamite, leaving two soldiers dead; a kidnap victim was killed in Caqueta province, after one year in captivity; a Conservative Party leader in Boyaca department was kidnaped, tortured, and murdered; a former governor and mayor barely escaped assassination attempts; two

bombs exploded in the city of Cartagena, one at a military recruitment office and one at a supermarket.

In the midst of this, "The Godfather" entered the scene to save the day. López Michelsen traveled to Caracas, where he engaged in "lengthy talks" with the guerrilla chieftains. He then informed the news media that the terrorists had promised not to interfere in the Oct. 27 elections. López went so far as to defend the guerrilla chiefs' claims of innocence in the latest terrorist acts, insisting that "they do not have total control over their combat fronts." López later explained that *both* sides in the negotiations had problems controlling the "extremists" in their midst, apparently a reference to those elements in the military who have resisted the Gaviria government's appeasement policies.

López recommended that the official peace negotiations continue, after the Oct. 27 elections. On the day that López cemented the so-called "rapprochement" with the narco-terrorists in Caracas, the Venezuelan national radio chain RCN announced that it had "completely confirmed" reports that López's eldest son, Alfonso López Caballero, was to become the next Colombian foreign minister. López Caballero will reportedly leave his ambassadorial post in France to take over the ministry immediately following the elections.

The Colombian population, left defenseless by a capitulationist government, nonetheless has a voice to protest with. The daily *El Espectador*, which has been the victim of repeated narco-terrorist attacks over the years, editorially denounced the fact that "violence is now everywhere: in the actions of the guerrilla and of the drug trade, and in the omissions of the government and of justice which, with their permissive attitude, offend the public conscience."