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PRIME MINISTER STEPHEN HARPER MEETS WITH COLOMBIAN PRESIDENT ÁLVARO URIBE

OTTAWA – Prime Minister Stephen Harper met today with Colombian President Álvaro Uribe. During their meeting the Prime Minister and President discussed recent progress on trade, security, labour, human rights and environmental issues.

“President Uribe and his government have made very important progress toward sustained peace, security and protection of human rights in their country,” said the Prime Minister. “Colombia is one of South America’s longest standing democracies and is growing in importance as a Canadian ally and trading partner. That is why it is so important we continue to build on this progress by embracing free trade between our countries.”

Canada and Colombia signed a free trade agreement on November 21, 2008, along with a labour cooperation agreement and an agreement on the environment. Legislation to implement these agreements is currently before Parliament. The Prime Minister urged opposition parties to co-operate with the government and expedite passage of this important legislation.

“We hope to ratify our free trade, labour and environmental agreements with Colombia soon,” said the Prime Minister. “Expanding free and open trade is one of our most important tools for fighting the global recession, encouraging economic growth and creating jobs.”

Colombia is an emerging market of 44 million people. An increasing number of Canadian investors and exporters enter the market each year. The free trade agreement will provide greater stability and protection for Canadian companies involved in the oil and gas, mining, manufacturing and financial services sectors. Canada-Colombia merchandise trade totalled more than \$1.3 billion in 2008.

President Uribe is visiting Canada from June 9 to 11, attending the Conférence de Montréal. He is accompanied by Minister of Foreign Affairs Jaime Bermúdez and International Trade Minister Luis Guillermo Plata.

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