

Center for Strategic and International Studies

Online Event

“A Discussion with President Iván Duque on Granting Temporary Legal Protection to Venezuelan Migrants in Colombia”

RECORDING DATE:

Thursday, February 25, 2021 at 4:00 p.m. EST

FEATURING:

His Excellency Iván Duque,
President of Columbia

Ambassador Mark Green,
Executive Director, McCain Institute for International Leadership

CSIS EXPERTS:

Daniel F. Runde,
Senior Vice President; William A. Schreyer Chair and Director, Project on Prosperity and Development, CSIS

Transcript By



Daniel F. Runde: I'm Dan Runde. I'm a senior vice president at CSIS. Thank you so much for being here today. This is an event hosted by the CSIS Americas Program.

Colombia is a great country. Colombia has taken an enormously important step to host 1 million Venezuelans through a temporary protection statute, a TPS, for Venezuelan migrants. This, I think, is one of the most consequential acts on migration that any country has taken in decades, maybe ever, in the Western Hemisphere. This is an enormous act of generosity. But Colombia's going to need the international community to help absorb all these folks who have come from Venezuela because of the mismanagement and the oppression in Venezuela. In some ways, Colombia is returning a spiritual favor to Venezuela, because when Colombia was having a hard time many Colombians moved to Venezuela. And Colombians remember that.

But this an act that's important to the United States. The U.S. has a stake in this. We need to be a friend to Colombia and support Colombia in this. We're really very fortunate to have his excellency the president of Colombia to talk about this really important step, President Iván Duque. To help us to frame this we have Ambassador Mark Green, who's the executive director of the McCain Institute for International Leadership at Arizona State University. And he is former the USAID administrator. And as someone who's been a long-time friend of Colombia, he's been awarded the Order of San Carlos by President Duque and knows the country very well.

I'm going to turn the floor over to Ambassador Green to help frame this up. He's leaving the McCain Institute and joining the Wilson Center as the new CEO in March. So the timing of this conversation couldn't be more interesting. So, Ambassador Green, I'm going to turn the floor over to you.

Mark Green: Great. Thank you, Dan. Thank you to CSIS for hosting this event. Dan, as everyone knows, you are passionate about freedom and prosperity throughout the Americas. So it's always great to join you.

Mr. President, I would like to begin on a somber note. I would like to begin by offering my deepest sympathies on the passing of your Defense Minister Carlos Trujillo. I got to know him well in my days at USAID when he was foreign minister. He was a great partner to us on so many of the projects and policies that our two nations undertook together. So losing him is another stark reminder of the costs of the COVID-19 pandemic. So our condolences to his family and to all the people of Colombia.

Mr. President, I am honored to join you today. I'm honored on my own account, and also that of the McCain Institute. As you know, the late senator was a true believer in Colombia's potential to shape a brighter future for all of the Americas, from taking on the scourge of narcotraffickers, to defending human rights and democracy, to strengthening trade and investment, he was a tireless champion of the Colombian people. As Cindy McCain reminded me recently, he was an early proponent of the U.S.-Colombia free trade agreement, which at the time maybe was not so popular. These days Colombia is a vital trading partner – \$28.9 billion in trading in goods per year.

Mr. President, during my time at USAID, there was no country that visited more than Colombia. A big reason for that was our support for your ambitious vision for Colombia's future. We joined hands on initiatives like your sweeping land titling project Ovejas, one that formalizes titles, cleared up records, reinforced property rights, and created great new economic opportunities for Colombians who, shall we say, have been left behind too often in the past. We worked together on projects like creating new opportunities for community-based, environmentally sound artisanal mines. These mines show rural communities a hopeful alternative to the many illicit gold mines out there that wreak havoc on the environment and too often fund criminal gangs and their armed conflict.

But, of course, these bilateral projects were not the only reason that I visited your beautiful country so often. And I'm sometimes asked if there was anything that surprised me when I took the helm at USAID. Well, perhaps I wasn't fully aware of the sheer scope and scale of the human displacement and forced-migration challenge around the world. And nowhere, of course, is that challenge greater than in the Americas, sadly.

The millions of Venezuelans who have fled Maduro's tyranny and economic mismanagement represent the largest single mass-migration event in the history of the hemisphere. And I think most in the U.S. don't really understand or appreciate that this year Venezuela will surpass Syria as the nation with the largest number of citizens leaving their country because of suffering, oppression, and fear – a manmade, regime-driven catastrophe.

More than 5.4 million Venezuelans have fled. And while many have spread out throughout the region, 1.8 million or so remain in Colombia, a country of only 50 million itself. By anyone's standards, Colombians have shown remarkable generosity and compassion in hosting so many Venezuelans in their time of great need. And that compassion and leadership is the other reason that I visited Colombia so often.

I've seen Colombian generosity first-hand in the trips I took to Cúcuta in the Colombia-Venezuela border. I've seen the daily flood of suffering families crossing the Bolivar Bridge, desperate to leave despair and hopelessness

behind. And I've seen the Colombians, who are on the other end of that bridge, there to greet them, providing food and medicine and comfort.

But we have to be honest. Such compassion is not without cost or consequence. It's simply not possible for Colombia to absorb so many of her neighbors without an impact on its own government services and budgets. And so, in short, I think we all agree the world owes Colombia a tremendous debt of gratitude.

While, as I said earlier, many of the migrants have spread out across the region, about 1.8 million have remained in Colombia, and too many in the shadows of the informal sector, undocumented. Some have been the victims of exploitation or trafficking or forced-labor conditions; sadly, too often women and young girls.

But Colombia under President Duque is once again showing remarkable, compassionate leadership in responding to this crisis inside of a crisis. And so today we have an opportunity to hear more about what the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees has called historic and the region's – his words – most important humanitarian gesture in decades.

Today we will learn more about Colombia's move to grant temporary legal status to many of those undocumented Venezuelans. This action will improve the lives of these victims of Maduro's oppression and will allow them a chance to contribute to Colombia's vibrant society and energetic economy. They'll be able to come out of the shadows. They will be able to push back against those who would exploit their vulnerability.

So to be clear, this historic step is not the long-term answer for sustainability in the region. The root of this problem is tyranny in Caracas. And to be clear, Nicolas Maduro is not acting alone. He would have long ago fled or fallen if not for the support of nations like Russia, China, Iran, and Cuba.

The U.S. must continue to help Colombia with the impact of Venezuela's economic and democratic implosion. And our allies should join in additional support as well. Just as the U.S. is often called on to help in other regions of the world, and we do and we do so out of partnership and friendship, our allies should join in additional support here as well – our allies in Europe, our allies in Asia, fellow members in the community of democracies. After all, historic humanitarian crises like Venezuela, their impacts are felt far and wide, especially in a time of a pandemic.

So, Mr. President, thank you for your inspirational leadership. I think it's fair to say that your bold humanitarian actions are setting a standard for upholding human dignity and upholding human liberty that will never be forgotten. And so with that, thank you for your leadership and all that you've done, and it is at this moment my great honor to hand it back to Dan

Runde and to introduce my dear friend, the president of Colombia, Iván Duque.

Thank you.

Daniel F. Runde: Thank you, Ambassador. Thank you so much for those words.

President Duque, I want to turn the floor over to you. I don't think you need much of an introduction, Mr. President. So I will just ask you to – I just think we'd love to hear some remarks from you and I'd love to – I've got a whole series of questions for you. But I'd love – I'm sure the audience would love to hear from you first, sir.

President Iván Duque: (Off mic) – event. I also want to express my admiration and gratitude and eternal friendship to Ambassador Green, someone who has worked in our country and has left a very important legacy, and we hope to continue working with him.

Dan, it is a great honor for me to participate in this event and, especially, to make some reflections about our migration policy. We took a decision a few days ago when we decided to create in Colombia a temporary protection status for 10 years that will protect something close to 1.8 million migrants.

We're not a rich country. We have less income per capita than countries that have taken bold actions in favor of migration in Europe and elsewhere. We know this has a fiscal cost. We know it has a social cost. We have done this because we want to set a framework of a migration policy based on fraternity and based also on humanitarian relief and protection.

I always recall in my speeches that this is not something that we decided recently nor has been motivated by political reasons. When I was a presidential candidate, I proposed to create a temporary protection status. I shared with the Colombians my vision that if we didn't take that road, we were going to leave people invisible with frozen bones, with a hunger, without having access to public services, and what is more worrying, without being able to have access to a formal and stable life.

So I made that proposal, and once I assumed office in August 2018, in September, we were having an event in the framework of the United Nations and we said that we were going to take that road. In December 2018, we launched a public policy for migration that was setting the ground for a temporary protection status.

We reiterated that on 2019 in the OAS General Assembly, and even in times and in the midst of the pandemic in 2020, we were able to express the need for that statute in a country like Colombia. Obviously, we saw that in the case of attending this crisis, which is now the biggest migration crisis in the

world, we have seen many pledges from different parts of the world. But none of those pledges have fully materialized, and maybe there is a gap between what has been pledged and what has been disbursed.

We have partners – strong partners – that believe in this path. And that’s why I want to express my thanks to Ambassador Green, because when he was in USAID he said I will work with you on this, and we got pledges, and we got the disbursements, and we got the support, and we went to the border zones. And now that we have made this decision, which is obviously for many people politically costly, that’s not in my consideration because I think there’s something that unites Colombia and Venezuela, and it is that our nations were born together.

We had, in Simon Bolivar, a Venezuelan, the leader who commanded our independence. The most important battle for independence in Colombia was fought in the state of Boyacá, and many of the warriors that crossed the Páramo of Pisba Pass with liberator Bolivar were from Venezuela. So the triumph of liberty was built together.

And also in recent history, when Colombia faced difficult circumstances, many Colombians moved to Venezuela and found an opportunity. My grandmother’s brother was one of them. And I remember how he built his life, and when we were young children he taught us the value of fraternity, how he felt it. He took us to the Colombian neighborhoods in Caracas when I was a kid, and I understood the sisterhood, the brotherhood of our nations.

Today, in 2021, we’re celebrating 200 years of the first Colombian constitution, the big Colombia, the great Colombia, that was the first constitution of Venezuela and Colombia, the Constitution of Cúcuta. And we celebrated showing the world that in times of need and despair and uncertainty, we can do and we must do bold things to protect.

But, obviously, I also take this opportunity, Dan, to say this loudly: When we look at what has happened in Syria, the capacity of mobilizing resources for migrant(s) has been around the 2,000 (dollars), some people say more than 2,000 (dollars), per migrant. In the case of Venezuela, we’re talking about on average in the last years of something that is below \$200. So we need to mobilize resources. And those resources are not for us, not for Colombia; are for those families in need.

And we need to raise the voice to understand that this is the world’s most worrying humanitarian crisis and migration crisis at the same time that we’re facing. It has surpassed Syria. And we also have to raise our voice to understand that the cost of this situation, which is a tyranny that brutalizes Venezuela on a daily basis, that has taken the economy to see 3,000 percent inflation rate, that has left more than 90 percent of the population in poverty, that’s what’s driving many people to leave the country. So we need

to work both ways – the humanitarian and fraternity migration policy, and also to do something about this tyranny that has affected millions and millions of Venezuelans.

So I'll close there, Dan, and I will finish by say this. Colombia knows that this is a challenge. We know that this is not an easy pathway. We know that what we have done when we adopted the temporary protection status, we're going to deal with many challenges. But so be it, because this is the right thing to do. It is a true act of peace, a true act of fraternity, a true act of humanitarian solidarity. And we will work day by day – today I was working with my team so that by next year, before the end of my administration, the 1.8 million migrants that are going to be granted with the statute are going to have their card, their TPS card, so that they will be visible and will actively participate in the social life of our country.

Thank you so much, Dan.

Daniel F. Runde: Thank you, President. You lead a truly great nation. This is a true act of generosity. It's "un historia grandesa." It's fantastic. Thank you for your leadership on this important issue.

Could you talk about what it means – what does temporary protective statute, what will it mean for the Venezuelan migrants specifically? You talked about some of the different aspects of it, but just tell us a little bit more about what will that mean for the 1.8 million Venezuelan migrants?

President Iván Duque: That's a great question, Dan, because many people have asked me: What is – what is the big change? And let me begin by saying that we have – out of the 1.8 million, we have something close to 900,000 that are already regularized, but on a temporary, close – short-term protection. And so they have to renew on a monthly or bimonthly basis their statute. In this case, with those 900,000, we're granting them the temporary protection status for 10 years. And that means they will have their card. We're going to use biometrics. We're going to use technology so that we know where they are, where they live and, at the same time, what are their social needs. So we know who of them or whom of them are in – under the poverty line, whom of them are registered on the health care system, so that we can grant the right protection.

Now, on the other 900,000 people, we just don't know where they are. We don't know where they live. We don't know their names. We don't know their socioeconomic conditions. We don't know their health conditions. And that means that they are invisible. And not only invisible, but that invisibility drives abuses, drives a high necessity, and they don't even have the capacity to be registered. They don't have the capacity to open a bank account. If they have an illness, they have to go through the urgency lines.

So now with this policy that is asking them to regularize. And we're going to have their names. We're going to have the biometric information. We're going to know their socioeconomic status. We'll know where they live. They can now access to services. But at the same time, they are not longer going to be abused because they'll be treated in the labor market as a Colombian, so that they don't get paid below what a Colombian gets paid in an abuse. But instead, they can participate actively in the economic life.

And this is bold in a sense, that this is a 21st century humanitarian and fraternal migration policy that one turns a difficulty into an opportunity. And using technology, the right registry, and also opening the scope of social services, they will become also contributors to development. And something that is important, Dan, is why we did it for 10 years. Because we acknowledge that when we – that when we see cases of massive migration, Dan, migration is never temporary. It tends to stay longer than everybody expects. So this is a way of solving in the midterm also a situation, and making it an opportunity.

And last but not least, something that is also very interesting with this, is that we can allow the migrants to attend health care services without having to use only the urgency line. Because what used to happen is that since they got to the urgency line. And in the urgency line people that are operating the service are obliged to give the service, it becomes a permanent rising high-cost debt for the health care system. Now they can go to the primary care, they can go to the primary medical attention. And that also not only reduces the cost but has a more intelligent way of attending their migrant population.

So all these are the benefits that we have considered so that we see this as a big opportunity. And I'm making a big call for other countries in the Western Hemisphere to do the same, to grant the temporary protection status to Venezuelans that are in need in their countries.

Daniel F. Runde: Mr. President, this is amazing. Talk about – so tie in – so you are a dentist, or a lawyer, or medical doctor and you're coming from Venezuela. Will they be able to practice their expertise in Colombia?

President Iván Duque: We have seen now cases – even when we talk about the 900,000 that are regularized today with a short-term permit – they actually can exercise those professions. Obviously, they have to homogenize their titles and the experience so that it is according with the Colombian legislation, the feasible way to practice their profession.

But now, when we think on the 10-year temporary-protection status, so people are not going to be renewing every month their permit; now they're going to stay for longer and they're going to be registered for longer. What we need to do is also allow those people who have the potential of

practicing professions in Colombia to do it with the right registry, with right information, but also cutting red tape.

And we have seen also a very important aggregated value. I was actually looking today that out of the 900,000 – because we have to consider there are children there – we have 200,000 that are net contributors to the health-care system. And that is important, because they have already formalized. They have received the contracts from companies in Colombia so that they are regularly paid, and they exercise their professions. If we expand that at the same time, I think it's going to be a win-win situation for them, but also for Colombia, and something that I have considered, because many people believe that it is politically unwise to make this kind of decisions.

I'm not thinking about politics. I'm thinking about social lives. I'm thinking about destiny. I'm thinking about transforming lives for the long run. I know that the dictatorship will come to an end. Maybe it'll be sooner, or maybe it'll take longer. But the dictatorship will come to an end.

And when there is a rebuilding of Venezuela and many of the people that have moved out consider moving back in, they will always remember those who treat them as brothers and sisters, who gave them the opportunity to work, who allowed them to pass time of sorrow and despair and feel brotherhood and companionship (sic; companionship), that is going to be crucial, because once those things happen, Colombia and Venezuela are going to have the strongest links ever in our history. And that is also a big bet for the long run.

Daniel F. Runde: Mr. President, is it fair to say that Venezuela was a very generous host to many Colombians over the 1960s through the 1990s?

President Iván Duque: It was. Venezuela was generous. What's interesting, Dan, was that it was not based on a migration policy. There was not a migration policy at the time, but there was a sentiment of giving opportunities. Obviously, it is interesting to consider that that massive movement of Colombians to Venezuela in the twentieth century was also aligned with a moment where Venezuela had the boom of the oil sector. So there were plenty of opportunities. There was plenty of richness. There were plenty of working-capital needs. So it was a win-win in the sense that many Colombians went to Venezuela, found the opportunities. But it was in a time of economic success. And we always will thank that. And as I told you, my grandmother's brother, he was one of them. He taught us what that meant for him.

But what's interesting about the decision that we have made is that this is no time of economic boom for anyone in the world. We're suffering the struggles of a pandemic. Those people are already in Colombia, and they have also suffered from the pandemic. And we decided, even though we're

not a rich country, you know, taking 1.8 million people to have this kind of access to opportunity obviously brings a cost, but we were already paying a lot of that cost.

So let's be sincere and let's be both humanitarian and fraternal. And I think it's also a strong message, Dan, because, you know, when I see cases around the world where migrants are treated with xenophobic sentiments or when I see the negation of the problem in many nations, I just think, how can this happen? So humbly, humbly, what we have done in Colombia, not being a rich country but a middle-income country, with this decision is say let's think different about migration. Let's ask – let's act different about migration all over the world. So we say no more to xenophobic sentiments. We say no more to negating the problem. And we say yes to build intelligent, well-thought, well-managed migration policies.

Obviously, there will be mistakes. Obviously, there will be challenges. Obviously, there will be red tape. Obviously, we will find many obstacles. But we have designed a roadmap that we want to use it as a reference for the world.

And I want to make a comment, Dan. I lived in the United States for almost 14 years in my life. And I was listening to Mark Green, and I remember that I was – I was doing my master's degree in Georgetown and two senators were discussing the United States a comprehensive migration policy, bipartisan, and those senators were John McCain and Barack Obama. And I remember that I had to read about that plan for a class and for a paper that I had to write, and I loved one thing, that it was truly bipartisan. Even though it didn't come out as they planned or it didn't come out at the first time, it was an exercise where people could leave partisan sentiments aside and think on migration as something that requires bold actions.

For me, that was an inspiration. And I'm glad that the decision that we have made in Colombia has been well-received by all the political spectrum – people from the right, people from the left, people from the center – because they know that this decision is going to make Colombia recognized worldwide as the nation that we are, a fraternal nation.

Daniel F. Runde: Mr. President, the United States values deeply our friendship with Colombia. USAID has one of its best mission directors, Larry Sacks, in Colombia. The United States is doing a lot, but maybe the United States, one of the – one of the opportunities I wanted to give you is, is there a – does the United States need to dig a little bit deeper, given this effort that you're doing? I think the answer is yes. So I'd ask you to – what message do you have for the U.S. Congress and for the United States of America about this effort, and what do you need from us?

And, second, I sometimes wonder, if you'll allow me some Spanish, there's a little bit of "mucho ruido y pocas nueces" sometime from some other parts

of the world in terms of they want to be supportive but sometimes don't fully follow through. Do you have a message for other parts of the world who are saying they want to be helpful to Colombia? Now would perhaps be the time to step up and really help, given sort of the comparison with Syria that you mentioned earlier, given that this is the largest humanitarian crisis in the world. I believe it's bigger than Syria, I think, is the case.

So what's the message for the United States? And what are – what's the message for other potential donor nations? Is this the moment to step up?

President Iván
Duque:

Well, Dan, I think it's right to say that – I have to express my gratitude to Larry Sacks. I mean, Larry in the field, it's simply fantastic to work with him. I mean, we have done works with USAID and his team here in Colombia. As Mark Green will recall it, we saw a massive titling program in Ovejas, Sucre, a town that has been badly affected by violence over decades, and now is resurging with the agricultural economy, and now with land titling is also closing social gaps. So that work has been tremendous.

I also want to thank USAID because they have taken to their heart the need to attend the migrants in the border zones. I think the work in Cúcuta has been great; and I think also interventions in Puerto Carreño and other areas; even in Maicao in the state of La Guajira. We have seen great work, great collaboration. The U.S. has given to Colombia more than \$200 million to attend the need.

Obviously, when we think about the whole international community, it would be unfair if I – if I don't recognize that last year was a mess for everybody. I mean, many of the resources that were aimed to be devoted for humanitarian aid had to be used in some other countries for attending the COVID effects. So I clearly understand that, and we had last year meetings from donor countries. But I think it's also good to be blunt and say I think there are many people that are concerned on what's happening in Venezuela, many governments, and many agencies, but many – we have too many people doing the same thing.

So we have to think first on whenever it's become – it becomes a pledge, let's disburse it. And I've seen a lot of pledges that don't get disbursed or they don't get disbursed in the right proportion. So the call for the international community is to accelerate the disbursements of the resources that have been pledged to attend migration needs.

The second thing is we have too many development agencies from different donor countries and each one of them has a vision of the problem and a solution to the problem. So it becomes sometimes complicated to articulate the efforts of everyone, and as I say it in a – in a pragmatic way, maybe we see too many vests from different colors doing the same thing.

Well, I think we have to articulate more, and it will be much better to have agencies maybe adopting specific places of the country with a coherent intervention that is aligned with what everybody's doing so that we reach common objectives. But that's something that we can improve, certainly.

Now, on the U.S. Congress, something that you say – something that I value, I think the U.S. at this moment has seen the crisis in Venezuela in a bipartisan way and in a bicameral way. It is very important that it remains like that, not only to attend the migrants but also to call things by their name and denounce the effects of the tyranny and the dictatorship in Venezuela.

So that's something that I will recommend. And, obviously, I think, with the temporary protection status where we're going to have good information, focalized information, and we will know the needs of the migrants, that will be a good way also to tackle the needs of a specific population so, for example, in the case of schooling, housing, in the case of health care system and nutrition, which has also been a major challenge because we have received thousands of kids in a very bad nutritional condition.

So the bipartisan way of dealing with this, I think, ought to be kept and I think it also adds that the reaction from the United States to the crisis in Venezuela is not based on partisan politics, but based on the principles that have been defined in the United States since the Founding Fathers as liberty.

Daniel F. Runde: Mr. President, you're going to be hosting the Board of Governors meeting for the Inter-American Development Bank next month. The president of the Inter-American Development Bank has put forward a call for a capital increase. The Inter-American Development Bank is the best vehicle for collective action. There are many European members and Asian members. A low-cost way, I suspect, to help accompany Colombia during this time would be to support a capital increase for the Inter-American Development Bank. What do you think about that, Mr. President?

President Iván Duque: Well, Dan, I consider the capital increase, it's a must, and it is a must because we have to think on the COVID world and then the post-COVID world. And in the COVID and post-COVID world, we need to have multilateral agencies with a stronger capacity to provide resources and lending to the countries.

So that's a must because if the needs keep on increasing and the bank doesn't grow, what happens is that the capacity of response from the bank is going to be limited. So yes, the capital increase is needed and, actually, I speak with this from my heart because I was in the negotiator team in the last replenishment that took place in 2010. So it is needed at this time.

But something that I would like to connect also with the United States, and I do this respectfully, is that this year we will be celebrating 50 years of the Alliance for Progress. We will be remembering that bold policy from President Kennedy for Latin America where he – where he wanted to move resources in favor of the countries in the region.

I think a good way to celebrate those 60 years of the Alliance for Progress is to move ahead with the replenishment of the IDB, which is a son of the Alliance of Progress. Even though the IDB was born in 1959, it was in 1961 they got the largest amount of resources to expand lending in Latin America derived from the Alliance for Progress.

So I think it'll be a great opportunity to set a good policy for the United States to Latin America and the Caribbean.

Daniel F. Runde: Mr. President, I have one more question for you. Then I want to get a couple of questions from the audience.

You wrote a book about the creative economy, something very close to our heart here at CSIS. We've done a lot of work, my colleague, Margarita Seminario, and several of my other colleagues have written about the Orange – the creative economy in Latin America. You've thought a lot about this.

Could you just spend a minute reflecting about how the creative economy in – both in COVID and post-COVID, and how it maybe fits into this conversation about receiving all these creative people from Venezuela? Maybe are they a part – are they going to be a part of the orange economy?

President Iván Duque:

I think there are two sides of the coin. We think about the creative industries and the orange economy in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis. The negative side is that most of these industries grow in human interaction. People go to concerts. People go to the movies. People go to the restaurants, and by the gastronomy sector. People go to museums. So with this crisis, that has affected one of the major sources of income of the industry. And that has to be rethought. And they have to reinvent it themselves in order to allow people to keep on consuming.

Now, to give you an example, in the case of the – of the movie sector, it has been more complicated because there are no movies coming out at the same pace as other years, because nobody's going to the theaters. So even though you would like to open a theater, people will have to go to the theater and watch the movies from last year. And so it becomes – it becomes like a vicious cycle. So that is a negative side.

On the positive side, I think that the reinvention is also very interesting. Now, what we see on virtual platforms or what we see in TOT (sp) services, it's also becoming a revolution. And now, for example, in the case of music,

people can connect virtually to live concerts and consume it in a different way. And we see now, for example, the audio/visual sector. Since there are many people consuming now series in their houses, we're seeing now proposals coming to Colombia to film in Colombia with the tax benefits that we create for the audio/visual sector.

So for some countries that is going to offer an opportunity because there's going to be an increasing demand of those – of those kind of content. So that's positive. But in a nutshell, I think that the most important thing, Dan, is that I am a true believer in the weight, the power, and the potential that creative industries have for the world and for Latin America. When we wrote the orange economy book, and that was in 2013, we were thinking of the seven eyes on institutions. We were thinking about research. We were thinking about on the market integration and inclusion.

And that was what we thought. Today we have the bill in Colombia. Today we have the sector in Colombia with new legislation bringing investment, and also building institutions to support the sector. And it was all inspired of things that we saw in the United States. And I'm happy to see now many companies from the United States coming to Colombia, film in Colombia, co-produce with Colombia, and opening the opportunity of employment to thousands of people. Now, for example, in our state and job training agency called SENA we have created a line fully devoted to services in the creative economy.

So all this is happening. And I know last year was very difficult. This year, hopefully with the massive vaccination, we'll get people back to the interaction in the cultural sector. But what is more important is that I consider that what we felt last year, what we lived last year is going to become an accelerator of history and an accelerator of the creative industries, and especially with the marriage of creative industries and technology. And I think there's going to be a revolution in the upcoming years that is certainly going to open opportunities for our countries and for the United States of America.

Daniel F. Runde: Let me just comment that I love your country. I went and did some tourism there with my favorite uncle. I have an asignator dependiente to go deep-sea fishing on the west coast. Some of the greatest deep-sea fishing in the world is in Colombia. So when this all ends, you're – on my list is to go visit –

President Iván Duque: We'll be waiting for you, Dan. We'll be waiting for you.

Daniel F. Runde: I'm desperate to go. I'm desperate to come. You have a wonderful country.

I've got a couple of questions that I think are important to ask, Mr. President, from the audience. This is from Hugo Andrés Mármol Sánchez, USAID's Venezuelan migrant human rights activity, known as CCD for its

Spanish name Conectando Caminos por los Derechos: Mr. President, with the new temporary protection status, what would be the message to regional and local authorities to start implementing this new measure?

President Iván Duque:

Well, thank you for that question. Something that I want to applaud as well is that when we made the decision, what happened in the subsequent hours is that we got a communique from the Colombian Association of Governors. We got a communique from the Colombian Association of Mayors and we got a communique from the Colombian Association of Mayors of Capital Cities from the States, and they all supported the decision.

And that is something that really means a lot to me, because this is not Iván Duque's objective. I think it has become a national objective. It has become a national purpose. And having that support from the local government means that they also want to do their best. And I know that many of them are struggling to have resources to attend the migration – the migrant population. And that's the reason why we have to work with the international development agencies with the idea that I just mentioned of them adopting specific regions that have the higher burden of migrants so that they can intervene, mobilize resources and help them to have the right institutional capacity.

But I think their support to the measure is something that means that we're all in the same page thinking on this fraternal policy.

Daniel F. Runde:

And another question from Lylian Peraza from Tres Puntos Consultores. It's in Spanish, but I'll ask it in English.

Mr. President, talk about how you're going to integrate children and young people into the education sector.

I think what she means is if you were in fifth grade, in the middle of fifth grade, or the equivalent in Venezuela, and now you're coming to Colombia, how are they kind of catching up or how are you bridging them to integrate them into the education system in Colombia?

President Iván Duque:

On the one hand, we already have a very important number of Venezuelan children that are in the Colombian education system. But something that is also interesting is that there are many children that have been born in the last few years that are the sons and daughters of Venezuelan migrants and they're now Colombian citizens.

So we have that situation. So what we're trying to put together is the expansion of the policy that we have today, because when we launched the public policy by the end of 2018, we had already identified that we need to open more opportunities for the children in the schooling system. And that implies also improving infrastructure and having more access in the different – in the different offers that we have per grade.

Why? Because what we don't want to see is a Colombian kid and a Venezuelan kid fighting, I mean, quote-unquote, for the access to a specific seat. So the only way that we can deal with that is also expanding the capacity in the education system, very well focalized, and something that we have done since we have made big investments in the schooling sector. And we have built more than 190 schools, and we're going to have 15,000 more seats for children in the schooling system just by the end of my term.

Well, that means that we have to think on the potential demand from the children that are either migrants or son of migrants, and that allows us to have a comprehensive policy in the long run. But that's also the kind of aspects where we can have international support in specific places of the nation where the need is bigger. And I'm talking about not only Cúcuta, but I'm talking about small towns in the border area. Remember that our border has more than 2,200 kilometers. So many of the small towns that we'll have, obviously we'll need to improve their education system. We'll be putting resources. But that can also mobilize resources from the international community.

But in a nutshell, we have already thought about that. We know what the investment should be. And we want to leave the investment cycle in our government, but also with a perspective for the next coming years.

Daniel F. Runde: Mr. President, one last question from the audience and then I've got a last question for you from me.

This is the question from the audience. Mr. President, COVID-19 has made it difficult for any businesses and workers in Colombia. Job opportunities are scarce, and earning a living is crucial for many families. Will your decision to grant temporary protective status to Venezuelan migrants hurt the economy for middle- or low-income Colombians? This is from Susica Torres (sp) from NYU.

President Iván Duque: I was actually reading this morning – rereading a book that is called “Migrants: Why We Need Them.” It is a very eye-opening statement. And that book shows that the best way that migrants can contribute to an economy is by having access – by having access to opportunities, so that they can formalize. And if you want me to bring an example, I will also bring the example of what we saw in the United States in the – in the early 20th century. Remember that it was in a time also on the Great Depression that many migrants came from Europe. Many migrants came from countries that were suffering the struggles of war, and dictatorship, and tyranny. And United States opened their arms.

Now we have families that are three generations that started in those years, and they have contributed to science, technology, entrepreneurship, you name it. So this – the amount of migrants that we have, they're already in

Colombia. They're informal. And they work. I mean, they want to work, but they work informally. And they don't have the right access to the right opportunities. As of today, and I don't want to be overoptimistic, but I'm optimistic, is that by the end of 2020 we were recovering – we were very close to pre-pandemic unemployment levels. Pre-pandemic we were around 12 percent unemployment rate. And we ended December 13.5.

So I think we're recovering employment. And obviously once we regularize and people are formalized, I think they can also participate actively. So they will be actors in economic growth. Now, that's why we also think consistently that our aim this year is to grow above 5 percent and keep on bringing investment so that the migrants keep on contributing to the economy at the same time that the Colombians do. Because we don't want to see this as a clash of nationality, but instead of a comprehensive policy where we want to open opportunities for all.

Daniel F. Runde: Mr. President, this is my last question for you. The support and friendship of Colombia has been a bipartisan cause in the United States. At the same time, I hope you'll make – I would like you to make a message now to some of the important leaders in our Congress – I'm thinking of Senator Menendez and Senator Coons, who are very thoughtful leaders and care about global development. They care about the region. What's your message to them about this act, and for their staff? Because they're watching this now. What would you like them to know? What do you want them to take away from this conversation?

President Iván Duque: Dan, let me put this in something that is a historical framework. In 2022 we will be celebrating 200 years of bilateral relationship between the United States and Colombia. Two hundred years. Colombia was the first former Spanish colony to be recognized by the United States as a nation. And those were the years of President Monroe and John Quincy Adams as secretary of state, and the role of Manuel Torres, a Spanish citizen that worked very hard for that recognition. Allow me to say that 200 years of bilateral relationships show how strong our relationship is. And in the last 20 years, we have seen a very strong bipartisan and bicameral support for Colombia.

I remember the days where Foreign Policy magazine, 20 years ago, had the ranking of failed states. And Colombia was not a failed state, but it was on the brink through – with the index. Today we have been able to make a big change. And we have to celebrate the change that we have accomplished in these two decades. And today Colombia's a member of the OECD. And today Colombia has advanced in terms of human development index in the United Nations. And today Colombia has been able to transform many industries and open opportunities.

Obviously, there's a big task that we have before us. But that change has been produced because we have also counted with an ally like the United States in a bipartisan and bicameral way. It was President Clinton who

started Plan Colombia, that was very important to fight drug traffickers and terrorism. But it was also President Bush who decided to move forward with a free trade agreement that allows us to have more trade and investment. And it was President Obama who decided to open more the spectrum of the bilateral relationship, and it was also President Trump who decided to open opportunity for nearshoring in the case of Colombia and also support us with the crisis in Venezuela. And now President Biden, who was one of the architects of Plan Colombia, is leading the United States, and he has been a true friend of Colombia. And we consider that we will have increasing opportunities in our bilateral relationship, not only dealing with narcotics and security issues but also climate change, renewable energies, creative industries, cross-border investment, nearshoring.

So I think the message is one of the most important foreign policy success stories between the United States and Latin America is the case of Colombia. So my objective is to keep on strengthening that relationship and to look forward for a new chapter of bilateral policy that will open the spectrum to new themes, new subjects, but at the same time keep on opening opportunities for us, because we see this also as a win-win situation.

(Pause.)

I think I lost you for a second, your volume. No?

(Off-side conversation.)

Daniel F. Runde: Yeah, yeah. So it's my issue. Sorry, Mr. President.

Mr. President, this is great. Thank you so much. I'm very, very grateful, and I want to thank you. Congratulations. We will – you know that you'll have a – you'll have friends here at CSIS doing what we can to be supportive. There's been already some research talking about what a great effort this is. You're going to be hearing more from us on this. Congratulations, Mr. President. (Buendin ?) con nosotros.

President Iván Duque: Thank you so much, Dan. It has been a great pleasure. And also my gratitude to CSIS and all the team. And also, once again, my gratitude to Ambassador Green.

So I look forward for you to come and do deep-sea fishing, and I also look forward for Mark to come and visit us again. All the best to you.

Daniel F. Runde: Thanks, Mr. President. Thanks, Ambassador Green. Thanks so much.

President Iván Duque: Bye-bye.

Daniel F. Runde: Bye.

(END)