

STATEMENT BY COLOMBIA'S SENATOR JORGE ROBLEDO:

THE COLOMBIAN JUSTICE MINISTER FABIO VALENCIA SHOULD HAVE RESIGNED BY NOW

Due to drug trafficking charges against his brother

According to tape recordings, businessman Juan Felipe Sierra, now in jail, and Guillermo Valencia Cossio, dismissed as Director of the Medellin District Attorney's Office and brother of the minister of Interior and Justice, conspired with alias "El Indio" --also in jail and a lieutenant of the powerful drug lord "Don Mario"--, to erase his photograph, as in effect happened, from the organizational chart of an organization accused of international drug trafficking (Cambio magazine, August 21, 2008). The evidence shows the close relations between El Indio and Sierra and of the latter with Guillermo Valencia and how the crime was committed through which Valencia received a four-wheeler worth forty million pesos. The same case forced two police chiefs of the departments of Valle and Antioquia, Córdoba and Chocó to resign.

In one of the recordings, Sierra refers to papers that Guillermo Valencia is to deliver and warns him: "Yes, but we have to talk about this transfer of documents because with this Fabio thing [the appointment of Fabio Valencia as minister of the Interior and of Justice] I don't think it's necessary to hand over any more documents". Later it was discovered that the minister pressured the Attorney General not to fire his brother but rather to allow him to resign, an abuse of power that he also tried to cover up with lies (RCN TV, August 25, 2008).

Guillermo Valencia did not reach such a high level in the District Attorney's Office because it was his career path or because he was a good lawyer, but rather because of the gratuitous appointment that the Attorney General Luis Camilo Osorio (accused of having been soft on paramilitaries) offered him in 2003, to fill a bureaucratic quota for the conservative Antioquia political leader Fabio Valencia Cossio, his brother. And for being one of Fabio Valencia's minions he received another privilege in 2005 from then Attorney General Mario Iguarán: he went from Assigned Prosecutor before the Antioquia Superior Court to Head of Medellín's Prosecutors Office, a move which should have lowered his salary from 14 to 9.5 million pesos, but didn't because he was allowed to keep his previous assignment, one which they shamelessly renewed

for him every four months for three years. That's how Guillermo Valencia got into the powerful position of Director of Prosecutors, all the better to commit criminal offenses, as everyone knows, but he kept the higher pay of Assigned Prosecutor. Was Justice Minister Fabio Valencia unaware of this? Did everything happen behind his back? Is the man that had him appointed to the Attorney General's Office not responsible for anything? Is the Conservative Party not either?

Also, in 2004, Alonso Salazar, now mayor and back then Government Chief of Staff in Medellín, requested that the Attorney General's Office be investigated because "it was in the hands of the mafia" (Cambio, September 6, 2008). In 2005, 2006, Salazar met with the Defense Minister Juan Manuel Santos for the same reason (El Colombiano, August 31, 2008). And in mid may of this year, through presidential advisor José Obdulio Gaviria, Salazar sent President Uribe a message incriminating Guillermo Valencia (Semana, August 30, 2008). Did the national government's obvious neglect of this matter have nothing to do with the fact that Justice Minister Fabio Valencia served as an important advisor in the presidential palace?

El Espectador's editorial on August 22 of this year called for the dismissal of Fabio Valencia from the Ministry: "In very few countries, including in the Colombia of not very long ago, there wouldn't be any doubts as to the political responsibility that minister Valencia Cossio should assume (...) For smaller scandals than the one that has arisen in this case, many public figures have given up their political ambitions (...) But each day in this country we are going to new lengths with the strange argument that we should expect condemnations or that everything has to do with an attack on the government by the opposition (...) Minister Valencia is overdue in tending his resignation, even if he's never committed an offense. And if he doesn't [resign], it's time for President Uribe to ask him to". It's clear that without political accountability, in addition to legal and criminal ones, societies degenerate.

For similar reasons minister Diego Palacio, the ambassador in Rome Sabas Pretelt and the Chief of Staff of the Presidency, Bernardo Moreno, should have also resigned by now, as they have been called to testify by the Attorney General's Office for their role in the crime of bribery that the Supreme Court of Justice has already found Yidis Medina guilty of, a case in which the Attorney General explained:

"In the end, congresswoman Medina gave in, not to

better arguments, but rather to specific offers made to her by officeholders", offers through which they bought the vote that decided the reform of the Constitution, which allowed Alvaro Uribe to be reelected President. But since the Head of State supports them, they continue in their posts, using power to protect themselves, as does Fabio Valencia. Let them provide the public with one good reason of State --not "good ol' boy" cronyism-- to keep them in office!

Senator Jorge E. Robledo
Bogotá, September 18, 2008.