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Andres Quintero Interview

Andres Taborda
Providence College

Jennifer Giffels
Providence College

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Andres Taborda '15 and Jennifer Giffels '14 of the Model OAS course in the Department of Political Science interviewed Andres Quintero, who is an expert in peace and conflict resolution. A native of Bogotá, Colombia, Quintero is currently pursuing a second graduate degree at Columbia University in New York and has many years of experience in the field of conflict resolution in Colombia and Ecuador. Below is a summary of the interview.

Andres Taborda: What is the role of the media and how are they impacting public opinion on the armed conflict in Colombia?

Andres Quintero: Well, let me tell you something about the history of the media. There was a time in which the media was quite involved. Colombian journalism has been quite free. A lot of people have free speech, but that is made a target by armed groups. The armed groups and drug lords threatened several journalists in past years.

Journalists have a lot of opinion, but not necessarily a structured opinion. There is a lot of emotion, a lot of feelings. At time it's like yellow propaganda that sometimes misses the structure of the analysis of what is going on.

The role of the media right now in Havana is that they weren't invited, which immediately upset them. There are a lot of opinions going around, but they're not necessarily informed of what is really going on in Havana because the media isn't there. In the end, we are going to see a final document agreed to by the negotiating actors, but we'll never know what the process was.

Media has a lot of responsibility, but it has to be trained to go beyond on the news. It's missing a lot of analysis and the people who are making analyses are pretty biased.

Andres Taborda: As a scholar and a Colombian, what is your opinion on the ongoing peace talks taking place in Havana, Cuba?

Andres Quintero: The piece talks right now is a new effort; it's a new strategy. First off, not negotiating within the country. Rather than negotiating in Colombia, they are doing it in Cuba. Also, having the opportunity to have leader negotiating with leaders in new. The people representing the government are trained in negotiating. Finally, it's a new moment. This is a new situation. A lot of different factors have made this a new situation, which makes this peace process different. I totally support this [process]. They have been able to keep the guerrilla at the table for three years and that's a good thing.

Jennifer Giffels: Do you see the role of the international community as an impediment or do you think there is a certain positive role it can play in these talks?

Andres Quintero: The international community is not willing to make an investment in the expensive part of a peace process: the post-conflict situation. If you don't have anything to offer to members of armed conflicts once an agreement is reached, all they have to do is change their name and continue with crime.

The international community has an important role. International organizations have announced that they are withdrawing from Colombia. The European Union and United States have slashed funding. As these key international players diminish their roles, it just means they will not be there in the post-conflict period.