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DEVLIN: Today is October 9, 2009 and we're in Bogota, Colombia with Diego Molano, the High Commissioner for Accion Social, the presidential agency for social action and international cooperation. Thank you very much for joining us.

MOLANO: No problem. You're welcome.

DEVLIN: Perhaps we could start—you've had a long history of involvement with CCAI (Center for Coordination of Integrated Action), so perhaps we can start by talking about how CCAI has developed over time because the way it works today and the way it's structured today is very different from 2004.

MOLANO: I had the good fortune of being one of the creators of CCAI from the beginning. That's from scratch. In the year 2004, after President (Alvaro) Uribe came to power, he was charged with implementing the Democratic Security Policy. During 2002 and 2003, the military forces started their different operations, particularly in the most difficult areas and they were recovering [control in] all the areas that were affected, particularly the areas in the south of Colombia occupied by the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia)—more than 40,000 hectares provided for in the previous peace process that was brokered at the end of the Andres Pastrana administration. In this area, the Democratic Security Policy decided to start recovering control of the territories but then—in the year 2003—they [told] the President that they needed not only a military presence and a police presence, but they needed institutional strengthening and presence of the government as a whole as well.

If you look at the map, Colombia is more a territory than a state. Almost 50 percent of the territory is covered by savannahs—by jungle—where, because of the lack of state presence, narcotics traffic has generated a history of illegal armed groups. Initially they were ideologically affiliated to the Communists and to their guerrillas in the 60s, but then they started to evolve during the 70s and during the 80s—not only in these areas, but also in other areas with the same characteristics.

Fifty percent of Columbia's territories are savannahs and jungles, but in the other 50 percent there are spots where you have the same problem. No state presence, really difficult geographic situations—lack of roads and easy access. The presence of guerrillas there also generated violence with the beginning of narcotics traffic and involvement of the guerrillas—first with the cartels, and then with the guerrillas protecting the cultivated areas. These areas became very violent. Then, with the eruption of the paramilitaries in Colombia, it was a worst-case scenario for the government in early 2002. The whole campaign, military campaign, started to bring the presence of the government to these areas, but with a new strategy, with a new approach.

That was when the government decided to create the Integrated Center for Coordinated Actions—ICCA. The principles that led to creation of the Center were basically three: One, it should be based on inter-agency coordination. We understood that the only way that we could add value was to work together in those areas. It was not a matter of agriculture, a matter of infrastructure, a matter of education; it had to be a comprehensive approach based upon inter-agency cooperation.

The second principle was to instill some trust in the military. That was really difficult at the beginning. I really suffered a lot [of frustration] because we didn't have trust between all our institutions—all the social institutions, such as Accion

Social, or the education and health ministries, thought the military was very close to the paramilitaries. They didn't trust the military. And all the military and police forces at that time thought that all the social workers were very close to the left. What helped us create trust was that President Uribe held a meeting and told us, "Look, you have to stop this. We are only one state and the state has to have security and social development at the same time. We need security for development and we need development for security. This is not possible that we continue working as if we are different parts." We started a process of instilling confidence and trust among ourselves.

The third principle that was that we needed to be low profile. No one institution was to be the prominent institution. However, the effort had to be seen externally as an effort by the government of Colombia, the state of Colombia, under presidential leadership—not the military, not the civilian ministries— the President, the government. And with this low profile, we had to implement very concrete actions in the short term, in the middle term, and the long term.

That's the way we started to work. It was a very simple method. We targeted some areas defined in common by the military and our civilian ministries—areas characterized by illicit crops, the presence of armed groups, and internal population displacement, because they were expelling populations from those areas. Then we targeted these areas and we started to develop very concrete plans for the short and the long term.

We created five tools. First, humanitarian assistance; and then some social programs for education and health; and then we started to work on infrastructure, social infrastructure—rebuilding, reconstruction. Next, we started economic development programs. And finally, we discovered that sports, culture, and leisure were really key aspects to regain confidence of the population in the government and trust in our institutions. We started the Center and we asked the institutions that they appoint full-time officials to the Center. Then we started work—very practical, very low profile, concrete actions—working all the time with the military.

Now the program is much more sophisticated, but this is just what happened at the beginning.

DEVLIN: So this question of trust—building trust—between the different agencies, that's a problem that a lot of governments have in a lot of situations. Looking back now can you think of ways that really helped you build that trust? That culture?

MOLANO: First, that's why we created the name, the "Center for Coordinated Action of the President of the Republic." It was very simple. It was not an effort by Accion Social. It was not an effort of the Minister of Social Protection. It was not an effort by the military. The Center was the most important thing—the Presidency representing the government.

The second approach was the leadership of the President Uribe. President Uribe was working all the time at leading by example. He always brought the military and the civilians together. It helped a lot. But the other thing is that we started to develop practical activities in the field. I don't know to translate it, but the military held medical fairs where you go for clinical attention. They called them "medical fairs." We started to call them inter-institutional activities. The military agreed to change the name and we joined together with the military, and in this process of working together we were gaining trust. The military learned that we in the civilian

agencies had a lot of information about security in the area and what was really happening to the people. We started to trust each other because we had information about what was happening in the field [that we could share].

DEVLIN: And you said that you were maybe a little surprised that sports and culture [turned out to be] a key effort that you had to push. Do you remember an example of this? Where this has worked well?

MOLANO: Yeah. Plenty of them. In the previous period some of these areas were kind of like a capitol of football teams. They used to be completely managed by the FARC. When the army came back and recovered control of the territory, there was still kind a sense of insecurity. People used to go home at 6 p.m. Nobody went out after 6 p.m. even though the military was there. But it was not a complete presence. The best way to show security and confidence is to occupy public spaces like sports centers, like the fields. We started to organize football matches and parties in order to show them that they can go out at night and do different activities to show them that it was very simple and very cheap to own or appropriate public space for them.

MOLANO: Another example is something called "The Gold Boat." It was in Cartagena District in the south. For more than five years after the guerrillas, there was a very traditional fair that they organized and really appreciated. But after the guerrillas had a presence there, they didn't organize it anymore. But it was very symbolic for them, so we organized it for the first time after the military came back and it became very popular again, showing them that they can really get participation of the whole community and that they can really enjoy themselves at this fair that they organized.

Another example is in San Jose de Apartado. They had a massacre there. We had internal displacement of more than 1,500 families there. They started to come back after military and police presences were restored, but they weren't sure about it. But they had had a very popular avocado fair. So we restarted the avocado fair, and around this fair we promoted economic activity because our farmers were replanting it again. These cultural activities were really part of the whole process.

DEVLIN: So in the early stages of CCAI, most of the work was done in that southern zone where the army had…

MOLANO: No. From the beginning we started to work I think in seven regions. One in the north, Sierra Nevada in Santa Marta, you have already visited?

DEVLIN: Yes.

MOLANO: It is the most successful one. It's an example of a very interesting approach because in this sense it was like you have two examples, the south, Cucuta and in Sierra Nevada. What happened Cucuta, was the military just [launched a] massive military campaign. They took over, reached out to the population, and then we went in after them. What happened in the Sierra Nevada was just the opposite. The military couldn't go there. We entered first. We had a humanitarian crisis—a lot of malnutrition, a lot of population displacement. We built roads. We [started] activities and gained trust. Then the military could enter. These are two different approaches.

DEVLIN: This was Accion Social or CCAI?

MOLANO: The CCAI. CCAI.

DEVLIN: So you went in before the security was there?

MOLANO: Yeah. We facilitated entrance of the security [forces]. For example, we built roads. We built schools first. We provided some humanitarian assistance. With the roads, the military could build up and support a battalion. We told them, "Look, now, in this area, you have to have a training center—a military training center." [This was possible] because we gained the confidence of the indigenous population.

DEVLIN: So right from the start you had the seven zones all at once?

MOLANO: Yes, in two months we defined the three major areas.

DEVLIN: And how did you choose those zones? How did you evaluate that?

MOLANO: Basically, with a criteria of military presence—high levels of violence. Illicit crops activities.

DEVLIN: So there were the zones with the most security problems, you would say?

MOLANO: Yes. Definitely.

DEVLIN: Okay. And then once these zones were set up, there was, as we understand it, there was this Padrina Model. There was a person who would…

MOLANO: A Godfather, yeah.

DEVLIN: Linking the central unit to the zones. Can you talk about why that model was chosen and what were the good things about it, and maybe what were some of the things that needed improvement?

MOLANO: I think it was excellent from the beginning. The key aspect of the Center was that we had the 14 institutions. At the beginning, we asked the ministries and the institutions to appoint somebody full time, but we told them we don't want high profile people. We want efficient guys. We want somebody who can really mobilize resources within your institution. This was key, because if you have a minister, he is so busy that he can't really allocate resources and work full time here.

We already had identified who was likely to be the champion, the key guy, in an institution and we invited them to be appointed. And also, at the Center we have an executive board meeting every week—two hours, very organized—with the presence of the Deputy Minister of Defense and, at that time, the previous High Commissioner. And there was a technical secretary. They worked together all the time—the military, the civilians. The idea of a godfather was good because when we traveled to the areas, even though we had 14 institutions, we would find a guy that though he was part of one institution, like Education or Interior, he started to care about the whole region. He started to be accountable for the results in these regions. He knew about his sectoral matters for all the areas, but he really cared about a particular area. Then he became a perfect link between the community, the local authorities, and the other 13 sectors. It worked very well.

DEVLIN: So it's often a problem finding the right people and you just mentioned that you were very specific about the people you wanted. But how did you find them? How did you find these lower level but very proactive people? How did you know them?

MOLANO: We already at that time had two years in the government and we knew people from observation and experience in the other sectors who were clever.

DEVLIN: Now it seems—from the outside, it seems like the experience in La Macarena with the plan for consolidation there, really was a pivotal moment. The model of CCAI seemed to change a little with that. Could you talk about that process?

MOLANO: CCAI was really flexible in adapting to the La Macarena model. At that time the military started to put pressure that they needed a stronger presence in the region and they needed a different approach. We decided to accept the challenge of getting there and to create this future center, now the regional coordination center, in the area. The Minister of Defense promoted such activity. We agreed and we did it. We organized it, and it started to provide results. And that's why we decided to adopt it for the other regions and it has worked well.

DEVLIN: What was the debate there? Because as I understand the Ministry of Defense, they liked the Macarena model, but there must have been—you must have seen some negative sides to it. Were there some things you were not sure about?

MOLANO: Basically, there was at that time a kind of a tension between the La Macarena model, the regions, and CCAI—a tension between this model and what CCAI was accustomed to do as its normal business, but also because the CCAI model was really working with institutions and creating institution building at the local level. In the La Macarena approach you are supplanting institutions. You can do it fast. If you have the money you can import institutions. You can hire guys to run these things, but you are not creating institutions. This is the problem with development. You need to create institutions. You need to do something on the land—build institutions together with the local population. And then you create capacity at the local level. La Macarena was very fast in hiring people, putting people there, putting more presence, but we were more concerned with change and building capacity at the local level. We were dealing with not only the problems of the moment in the area, but also the long tradition of very weak institutions at the national level. Of course, at the local level it's really worse. You can supplant and do it fast, but you're not really creating capacity. It was a tension and still is a tension that we have.

DEVLIN: Can you talk a little bit about how that debate tied into the production of the national consolidation plan? How the national consolidation plan influenced CCAI towards a new direction?

MOLANO: It was kind of a window of opportunity in the development of public policy. We were waiting to evaluate our impact—how was the military campaign going; are we achieving the social recovery of the territory? We and the military thought that we were going in the right direction. But the Minister of Defense and the President, told us, "No, you have to really rethink how we can do we more—a different way that can really get results; a pivotal change in the whole approach." And that is why the consolidation plan, but we had the experience and the experience of CCAI to provide a lot of insights on what the approach of the Plan de Consolidation should be.

DEVLIN: And one example of maybe the Macarena model moving elsewhere is Montez de Maria, they have a much heavier presence there. But that's not the case everywhere now. Are there are still some areas working with the Padrina Model?

MOLANO: Not anymore.

DEVLIN: Not anymore.

MOLANO: Not anymore.

DEVLIN: So then CCAI has really adopted—The Macarena model is really…

MOLANO: I would say yes.

DEVLIN: Okay, that is—in your view…

MOLANO: No. Now we have 11 areas and within these 11 areas we decided to have a regional government center in seven or eight of them. The others we feel that we can manage it from Bogota.

DEVLIN: And in terms of the international partners—Colombia's international partners and their involvement in CCAI, how would you describe that? How important was that? And how important will it be, do you think?

MOLANO: I will say that it has been evolving in two ways. At the beginning, we had a lot of support from the Southern Command of the United States for the concept of inter-agency coordination and creation of the centers. And no other official aid agency, such as USAID [The United States Agency for International Development] for example, believed in the model. So we started, basically, with national resources. We developed the whole Center with national resources. After two years of operations when we saw the results, we called them again, "Look what we are achieving." They decided to support the effort as a complementary, not main effort. This effort had been funded mainly by national resources. USAID started to develop some projects around these areas. One, in institutional and education and health in 2006, but we had already had five years of operations behind us. And then USAID got very interested in La Macarena and what we were doing in La Macarena and the model we created there. The results of La Macarena also raised their interest and motivation in full support for the consolidation plan. And now there is very strong support and commitment from international community for the consolidation plan. But the consolidation plan is a national consolidation plan where we are allocating our resources. We only expect complementary resources from international cooperation.

DEVLIN: Now you said that in the beginning, at least, USAID didn't believe in what CCAI was doing. What do you think were their misgivings? What do you think they were hesitant about?

MOLANO: I think there is in international community a mistrust of military forces and working together with the military on social and infrastructure programs.

DEVLIN: And one last question if I may. As you've described it, the challenge was changing everyday. There were a lot of immediate needs. And it's still changing. CCAI is still changing. But when you look back now, are there lessons learned from those years? Things that stand out?

MOLANO: *Um.*

DEVLIN: Or maybe things that you would have liked to know when you first started?

MOLANO: *There is one lesson learned in terms of interagency coordination—ego management. You have to manage egos and then you have to have a high and supreme objective to which people are really committed. Try not to show personalities or institutions. Instead really create commitment for the objective and for the goals. If you work with a low profile; if you give recognition to everybody at the same time, and at the same level, this really helps. But this requires certain competencies among the officials. It is not the same when you don't have this kind of commitment. It really was kind a lesson learned by all the interagency participants.*

And the other lesson learned in the whole process is about that CCAI work, when you have kind of work in the, I will say in the "meso" level, You have "macro," "meso," and "micro." When you work at the macro level, the discussion is all about policy—very high profile. Micro is just projects. CCAI really worked at the meso level—regional programs, parallel planning, parallel execution, parallel evaluation—within all agencies and very concrete. If you work at the micro level, you lose perspective. Work at the macro level is too high to really create an impact. This meso effort was like a matrix of things to do in every region. We went there. We consulted. We provided for participation. We got feedback from the community. We had a kind of traffic light system that told us when to start or not start, very practical. This really helped a lot and can be useful now.

DEVLIN: Well thank you so much for taking the time. We really appreciate it.

MOLANO: *No, you have another question? I have a couple minutes more.*

DEVLIN: You have a couple minutes more?

MOLANO: *Yeah?*

DEVLIN: Then one last question in that case. A lot of this was new to the Colombian government. This was a new model of governance in a way. And even when you talk about working in a decentralized country you have to interact with the department or municipality. So could you talk about how, if you developed any strategies to manage opposition or pushback to what you wanted to do? Cause even from the ministries, from the departments, from the municipalities, this could not always have been popular, I imagine.

MOLANO: *This approach has never been criticized. The international community reacted to involvement of the militaries, but generally people like it because you are bringing health, education. We also provide a lot of integration and involvement of the local authorities. And in the government, basically, they were really highly motivated because they were seeing results. Because we knew that we were making history, changing those areas that were really left out as a part of Colombia. We understood, and we understand now, that if we recover these territories, we can really change the balance of violence in Colombia. This, for us, is a really a quite high objective and that's why it has not really been criticized.*

DEVLIN: Thank you so much.