

Bush congratulates Uribe

THE MIAMI HERALD
MAY. 30, 2006

BOGOTA, Colombia - (AP) -- Strengthened by his landslide reelection, conservative Colombian President Alvaro Uribe on Monday prayed for good fortune in his second term and for peace in this violence-wracked nation.

"I have a huge responsibility to serve the fatherland," Uribe told cheering supporters outside the Santa Teresita church in his hometown of Medellín, Colombia's second-largest city.

Foremost among his tasks will be fulfilling a pledge to end the threat from leftist guerrillas and drug traffickers, while dispelling concerns he may abuse his powerful new mandate.

In Colombia's least violent election in more than a decade, Washington's staunchest ally in Latin America won a second term with 62 percent of the votes on Sunday -- 40 points more than his closest rival, Sen. Carlos Gaviria of the leftist Alternative Democratic Pole party.

It was the first reelection of a Colombian incumbent in more than a century. Congress last year approved a constitutional amendment allowing reelection.

White House spokeswoman Eryn Witcher said President Bush called Uribe Monday morning to congratulate him and to commend the Colombian people for their commitment to democracy.

"The president spoke of strong friendship between them and our two countries. The president reaffirmed his strong support for Colombia in its continued battle against narcoterrorism, in moving forward on our free trade agreement and in helping our democratic friends in the region."

The win by Uribe, 53, also ends a series of election triumphs by leftist candidates in South America, which now has left-leaning governments in Venezuela, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Argentina and Uruguay.