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Embassy of Colombia in the United States

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Contact: Olga Acosta

202-821-2792

National Geographic Honors President Santos for Unwavering Commitment to Protecting Biodiversity

Washington, DC — Today, the National Geographic Society honored Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos for his efforts to conserve biodiversity and foster sustainable development. Gary E. Knell, president and CEO of the National Geographic Society, and Jean Case, Chairman of the National Geographic Society Board of Trustees, recognized the Colombian head of state in a ceremony at the Society's headquarters "for service to humanity in promoting a more balanced and peaceful world."

"Colombia is a world treasure of biodiversity. Our duty to current and future generations is to protect it and guarantee the sustainable development of our country," said President Santos.

Among the milestones highlighted is Colombia's achievement of the goal of increasing the number of hectares of protected ecosystems in the National Development Plan and the Convention on Biological Diversity, important advances in the nation's international commitments to protect biodiversity. Another recent achievement is the expansion of emblematic indigenous territories, which guarantee the connectivity of those protected areas with national protected areas and the protection of indigenous traditional territories to ensure their quality of life and well-being in the future. Examples of this achievement include the extension of the Puerto Sábalo Los Monos Indigenous Reserve, Monochoa and Putumayo to a total of 9,644,323 hectares in the municipality of Solano (Caquetá), south of the Chiribiquete National Park.

"It's an honor for National Geographic to recognize President Santos for championing policies that will help us achieve a planet in balance," said Knell. "This recognition is a sign of our respect and appreciation for Santos' work."

"For a nation with such abundant natural resources that is committed to conserving them for future generations, this is an extraordinary honor," said Colombian Ambassador to the United States Camilo Reyes. "We thank National Geographic for recognizing the nation's efforts, and specifically the efforts of President Juan Manuel Santos, to ensure that Colombia remains the second most biodiverse country in the world."

From its tropical rainforests, Amazon jungle, deserts and moorlands to the perpetual snowfalls in the Andes Mountains, Colombia's unique climate and wide-ranging ecosystems make it the second most biodiverse country in the world. During the Santos

Administration, the government of Colombia has implemented a series of policies and initiatives to preserve biodiversity and protect the environment.

With a continental area of 1,141,748 sq. kilometers and a territorial sea of 928,660 sq. kilometers, Colombia is considered one of the world's 17 megadiverse countries. Colombia has a rich mix of ecological, climatic and biological components in its 314 ecosystems and 59 protected areas. The protected areas are composed of 41 natural parks, 11 fauna and flora sanctuaries and two natural and five biosphere reserves. It is also the home to the highest seaside snow mountain in the world, La Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. The areas protected as part of the System of National Natural Parks preserve 75 percent of the lakes and moorlands and 62 percent of the aquifers.

In addition, the Colombian Amazon is home to 10 percent of the world's biodiversity and produces 15 percent of the world's oxygen. Colombia also ranks third in the world in fresh water production, exceeding both the United States and India. Colombia is home to more than 1,800 species of birds, the most in the world, and is also home to 3,000 species of butterflies, the second most in the world.

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