



Source: Gaviria, 6 February 2004, Wikimedia, photographer Marcello Casal Jr.

GAVIRIA TRUJILLO, César Augusto

Colombian politician and seventh Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS) 1994-2004

By **Carolyn M. Shaw** · Version 29 July 2015

Was born 31 March 1947 in Pereira, Risaralda, Colombia. He is the son of Byron Gaviria Londoño, coffee grower, and Mélida Trujillo Trujillo. On 28 June 1978 he married Ana Milena Muñoz Gómez, economist, with whom he has one daughter and one son.

Biography

Gaviria is the eldest of five brothers and three sisters in a middle-class family. He spent a year at Roosevelt High School in Fresno, California through an American Field Service exchange program and began his study of economics at the Universidad de los Andes in Bogotá in 1965. In 1968 he became president of the Colombian branch of AIESEC, the International Association of Students in Economic and Commercial Sciences. He graduated in 1969 and began his political career shortly thereafter. From his first entry into politics he represented the Liberal Party, following the disposition of his father (his mother came from a Conservative background). In 1970 he was elected as a city councilman in his hometown Pereira, where he held office for four years. During this time he also worked in the private sector as a general manager for Transformadores T.P.L., a company that sold and serviced transformers, and served as the Assistant Director of the National Planning Department under President Misael Pastrana Borrero. In July 1974 he was elected to the national Chamber of Representatives, representing the Department of Risaralda. As a representative, he put his economics

degree to work serving on the Chamber's Economic Affairs Committee. In 1975 he took a break from the Chamber when he was appointed as Mayor of Pereira, returning to the Chamber a year later. Gaviria frequently contributed economic and political columns to *La Tarde* in Pereira as well as the national paper, *El Tiempo*. He quickly gained recognition in national politics and rose in power. After assisting President Julio César Turbay Ayala with his campaign in the Risaralda region, Turbay appointed Gaviria as Deputy Minister of Economics (1978-1980). He returned to Congress, became chair of the Economic Affairs Committee (1981-1982) and served as President of the Chamber of Representatives (1983-1984). In 1985 he left Congress to become more directly involved in presidential politics by working as the campaign manager for Virgilio Barco Vargas, who won the 1986 Presidential election. After the election President Barco appointed him as Finance Minister. In a very short period of time Gaviria drafted major agrarian and tax reforms that were enacted by Congress. These measures helped modernize the tax collection system and increased revenues. Just ten months after this appointment President Barco shifted Gaviria to serve as the Interior Minister. In this capacity Gaviria began working on a peace initiative with the M-19 guerillas that eventually led to their demobilization and reintegration into civilian life as a political party in 1989. His reputation as a peace builder began with this work in Colombia.

Gaviria's political career inadvertently benefitted from the assassination of Senator Luis Carlos Galán in August 1989, whom Gaviria had served as campaign manager since February. After the attack, perpetrated by the Medellín drug cartel, Galán's family and the Liberal Party asked Gaviria to run for president in his place. During this campaign three other presidential candidates were assassinated and Gaviria narrowly escaped an attempt when he cancelled a flight at the last minute. The plane on which he was scheduled was bombed, killing over one hundred passengers. In the end Gaviria won a solid electoral victory in May 1990 with 47 per cent of the vote. His closest rival was Conservative candidate Álvaro Gómez Hurtado who received 23 per cent of the vote. As President of Colombia between August 1990 and August 1994 Gaviria had a mixed record. He continued his policy of implementing reforms, but ultimately was unable to reduce political violence in the country. Gaviria began his term by convening a Constituent Assembly to draft a new constitution with reforms to the judicial system and mechanisms to guarantee fundamental human rights to citizens. The constitution was approved by national plebiscite in July 1991. He also made further reforms in pursuit of greater regional economic integration. He revitalized the Andean Pact, establishing a free trade area and customs union between Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru in 1992, and brokered a trade liberalization agreement with CARICOM, the Caribbean Community and Common Market, in 1994. He also helped to establish a free trade area with the Group of Three (Colombia, Mexico and Venezuela), which came into being in 1995. Although some members of his administration preferred to move slowly with more moderate reforms, Gaviria pressed ahead with rapid and more radical reforms throughout his presidency. Some of the members in his presidential cabinet rose to become leading Colombian politicians in the next decade, including Ernesto Samper (President 1994-1998) and Juan Manuel Santos (President since 2010). As Gaviria made advances in economic integration, he continued his battle against the drug cartels throughout his term, eventually hunting down cocaine trafficker Pablo Escobar after his escape from prison (the police killed him in December 1993). Political violence in Colombia, however, remained high as the cartels put pressure on officials who supported an extradition treaty with the United States (US).

During his term as President of Colombia Gaviria was quite active diplomatically in the hemisphere. In 1991 he met with the Rio Group, which was set up in 1986 by some Latin American states. The Group organized yearly summits of their heads of state and in 1991 successfully drew up the Cartagena Declaration, which was designed to strengthen regional security cooperation efforts. Gaviria restored diplomatic relations with Cuba in 1993 and participated in the founding conference of the Association of Caribbean States in July 1994. All of these endeavors helped him establish a positive reputation in the region leading up to his nomination for Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS). The OAS election in March 1994 was competitive, with Brazil, Mexico and the US supporting Gaviria, whereas many of the Central American and Caribbean states

backed the less well-known candidate, Costa Rican Foreign Minister Bernd Niehaus Quesada. Stories in the media at the time indicated that Gaviria instructed his foreign minister to lobby for votes by offering free trade agreements with Colombia (Brindley 1994). The US played an active role to win some Caribbean support. Gaviria won the election with 20 out of 34 votes. Some smaller states expressed resentment that the most powerful states had dominated the election process. When elected, Gaviria was still President of Colombia and he therefore assumed office as OAS Secretary General after completing his term as President.

Gaviria succeeded João Baena Soares as Secretary General and began his term in office on 15 September 1994. In his first speech at the OAS, shortly after taking office, he laid out a clear vision for the organization, which the General Assembly in June 1995 formally adopted as the *Declaration of Montrouis: A New Vision for the OAS*. Gaviria recognized the need for reform in order for the organization to remain relevant in the emerging new world order after the end of the Cold War. Some of his reforms were institutional, such as reducing staff by 30 per cent in order to reallocate resources toward programmatic funding. In 1995 Gaviria concluded a General Cooperation Agreement with the United Nations (UN) under Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, which established a basis for information sharing and collaboration between the two organizations. Other OAS reforms were a matter of sharpening the organization's focus and technical capacity, in particular in trade promotion and suppression of narcotics. Gaviria's *New Vision* acknowledged the strength of the OAS in upholding democracy with its 1991 Santiago Declaration (Resolution 1080), which had committed the OAS to respond collectively to interruptions of constitutional government in the Americas. Gaviria called for the OAS to remain in the forefront by playing a direct role in defending against threats to democracy. This call resulted in the Washington Protocol of 1997, which amended the OAS Charter to allow suspension of a member-state should democratically-elected governments be overthrown by force. Gaviria embodied this call through initiatives such as election monitoring. The OAS gained prominence through monitoring elections in the Dominican Republic (in 1994 and 1996) and in Haiti (in 1995 and 2000) and has continued to provide highly reputable monitoring. However, when the OAS discussed the Presidential elections in Peru in the summer of 2000, both opposition candidate Alejandro Toledo and the OAS observers urged to put off the elections due to the fraudulent behavior found during the first round and President Alberto Fujimori's refusal to give the OAS observers access to the voting software. Gaviria remained careful by speaking about irregularities, rather than fraud, but was unable to persuade the OAS to take action against Peru. Major countries such as Brazil, Mexico and Venezuela prevented the use of Resolution 1080 as well as sanctions, which were proposed by the US, because they did not equate an interruption of democracy with a *coup d'état*.

The technical capacity that Gaviria developed included establishing the OAS as the technical secretariat for the Summits of the Americas, an informal consultation process of American heads of state that had started in the early 1990s, based on the principles of democracy and free trade. The summits advanced neoliberal economic integration initiatives and promoted anti-corruption and anti-narcotic efforts. In June 1997 the OAS General Assembly adopted an Anti-Drug Strategy in the Hemisphere, building on and strengthening previous efforts to address problems stemming from drug trade and use. Recognition grew that these problems were transnational and required cooperative solutions. To gather in detailed data from all member states, the OAS developed a Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism in order to more effectively evaluate and address the narcotics problems. In the late 1990s the organization focused some of its technical expertise on de-mining in Central America, resulting in the Comprehensive Action Against Anti-personnel Landmines. This AICMA program succeeded in removing over 500,000 mines from the region, with Honduras becoming mine-free in 2000.

Gaviria's performance in office was viewed as strong and, even though some Central American states had nominated Rafael Calderón Fournier from Costa Rica for the post of Secretary General, the General Assembly of June 1999 reelected him by acclamation when his first term expired. In 2001

the OAS under Gaviria's leadership adopted the Inter-American Democratic Charter, which widened the Washington Protocol and, among other provisions, allows the General Assembly to suspend membership of any state experiencing an interruption to the constitutional order. In 2002 the OAS was awarded the W. Averell Harriman Democracy Award from the National Democratic Institute. Gaviria himself had been active in conflict mediation by sending special representatives and engaging in talks. His mediation efforts included the Peru-Ecuador border dispute of 1995 and the Nicaragua-Honduras border dispute of 1999 and he took a particularly prominent role in the Venezuelan crisis of 2002-2003 by trying to resolve the stand off between President Hugo Chávez and his opposition. Miguel Angel Rodríguez from Costa Rica was elected as the new OAS Secretary General in June 2004, taking up office after Gaviria had completed his term on 15 September 2004. When Gaviria left office after a decade of service, the Permanent Council praised his achievements in the areas of human rights, anti-corruption measures and peaceful settlement of disputes. Despite a lean budget, Gaviria had managed to strengthen key programs of the OAS, reinvigorate the organization and prepare it for the new millennium. Notwithstanding his record of activism, he did face criticism from some non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for not achieving more substantial consolidation of democratic processes in some countries, in particular those that were struggling with the additional challenges of poverty and underdevelopment. An observer from the Council on Hemispheric Affairs criticized his behavior and style as OAS Secretary General as too presidential for an international organization and too close to the US (Sanchez 2004).

After his term as Secretary General came to a close, Gaviria worked briefly as a scholar at Columbia University in New York, but then returned to Colombia. In Bogotá he founded an art gallery and in 2005 he took up the post of director of the Liberal Party, where he had risen to power during his early years in politics. Gaviria, who had a brother kidnapped (and released) in 1996, lost a sister to gunmen in 2006. In keeping with his dedication to preserving democratic norms, Gaviria was highly critical of President Álvaro Uribe of the Democratic Center movement, who passed a Congressional amendment to the constitution in 2006 that allowed him to run for a second term, although during the campaign Uribe had disagreed with consecutive reelection. Gaviria resigned from his position as Liberal Party director in 2009, but remained politically active in his country, dividing his time between lecturing, writing his memoirs (not yet published) and participating in an NGO dedicated to investments in the arts. Gaviria became an advocate for treating drug addiction as a health problem, rather than a criminal offense, receiving criticism from certain sectors that argued that this sounded like a legalization approach, which he denied (Aldunate 2011). In 2015 he became indirectly involved in the peace talks between the Colombian government and the guerilla movement FARC, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, stating that other parties, not just the insurgents, had been responsible for violence in the country. FARC has taken this as support for its position on transitional justice issues in the negotiations (Las FARC 2015).

Gaviria has followed the democratic processes and potential threats in the Western Hemisphere by maintaining connections with other leaders who share his democratic convictions through his associational memberships. He participates in the Club de Madrid, an organization composed of former presidents and prime ministers of democratic states who are committed to addressing the challenges of democratic transition and consolidation where they can make a difference. Members work with governments, international organizations, civil society, scholars and the business community to foster dialogue essential for social and political transformations. Among the people with whom Gaviria interacted were UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and Enrique Valentin Iglesias, President of the Inter-American Development Bank until 2005. Gaviria continued to defend human rights protections enshrined in the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights by authoring an op-ed in the *New York Times* of 19 March 2013, when he believed that the proposed reforms were curtailing the autonomy of the Commission. He is also associated with the Inter-American Dialogue in Washington DC, which works to build productive ties among Western Hemisphere nations, and the Conference of Montreal / International Economic Forum of the Americas, which promotes the role of the Americas in major decisions and reforms related to the global economic context. Gaviria, who

has supported women's rights, is a member of the UN Secretary-General's Network of Men Leaders, advocating an end to violence against women.

Gaviria has lived a lifetime of public service committed to promoting democracy, mediating conflict and advancing regional economic integration. During his time as President and as OAS Secretary General he never balked at putting forward reforms. He pressed ahead with reforms that he viewed as essential for the wellbeing of Colombia as well as the revitalization of the OAS. He holds that the Inter-American Democratic Charter has made a difference in the crises in Ecuador, Honduras, Paraguay, Peru and Venezuela (Aldunate 2011). His leadership has been recognized through the awarding of the Washington Times Award for Courage and Leadership (2002) and the Notre Dame Prize for Distinguished Public Service in Latin America (2008).

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