

## **Expo Shanghai: A Golden Opportunity**

Gustavo Gaviria Angel\*

\*Was appointed Ambassador of Colombia to the Special Mission and Commissioner General for Expo Shanghai 2010, managing to introduce the country to more than three million people, highlighting that the most important asset of Colombia is its people who possess an incomparable country, a combination that allowed him to offer it as a Preferential Strategic Partner for China and the world. In the productive capacity sector, doctor Gaviria is the president of the Board of Directors of Vision de Valores S.A., consultant for the International Finance Corporation IFC. Between 1998 and 2004 he represented Colombia at the World Bank; in 2007 he was part of the "independent Review Panel of the World Bank Department of Institutional Integrity, led by Mr. Paul Volcker. He has also been founding partner and president of several companies of the coffee-growing sector, such as: Industrias Aliadas S.A., SKN Caribe Café, Compañía Nacional de Café and Gavicafé, among others.

Expo Shanghai is the first world exposition in Chinese territory; and as it has always happened since 1851 when the first event of this nature was held, and the streets of London were packed with visitors anxious of appreciating products from a hundred different nations, the host country makes a spectacular display of greatness in order to mesmerize the world with its progress.

For many experts and veterans in this sort of exhibitions, Shanghai 2010 will be classified as the exhibition of the century, and the presence of Colombia in this event is a milestone in history. It took place between May 1 and October 31, 2010, being a commercial and cultural event, revolving around the concept “Better city, Better Life”, that represents the wish of mankind to achieve a better life in urban environments. The explanation of this effort is no other than boosting a deep reflection in regards to the growth projection of the population in the cities for the year 2030, which will house 60 % of the world population.

The event took place in a territory of 5.3 km<sup>2</sup> covering the sides of the Huangpu river. The goal of the organizers was to have long paths to make visitors aware of the human, urban and global dimensions, which are silently defining and wrapping us up as social beings. To achieve this, the intention was to make citizens observe the characteristics of their interactions with the metropolis, inviting them to meditate on the values that need to guide the urban planning of the future, in which all of us need to take more responsibilities.

Achieving more efficiency in the use of energy, applying new and improved technologies in waste and toxic disposals handling, improve mobility and mass transportation systems, achieving a more reasonable and orderly public space and relying on citizens who take responsibility for the protection of the natural environment with ethical values and a collective feeling, were some of the agendas developed in this wonderful city where the Asian ancestry and the French glamour, the British exquisiteness, the North American pragmatism and the Soviet existentialism live together, closely linked through history.

The area to respond to the requests of the organizers was not restricted to the participants' hall. Additionally, thematic fora were held in Shanghai and other Chinese cities to promote debates associated to the different topics of the Exhibition. As the central topic of the event, the commercial agenda is of strategic importance. The presence of corporate pavilions was a mechanism to show the progress in different industries and to consolidate projects with and within the participant countries. In a word, this was an open forum where politics, diplomacy, business, environment, energy and competitiveness were discussed in a framework conceived for alliances, business and long term bonds.

## **Our participation, our pavilion**

Colombia's decision to participate in Expo Shanghai 2010 is the acknowledgement of the importance of China to our country. It is a tribute to diplomatic relations with this nation and a space for gratitude for their unconditional support throughout these 30 years of relationship. It is important to notice that Expo Shanghai was part of the ideal scenario to celebrate our bicentennial with millions of visitors.

This decision materialized last May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2009 when participation to this event was confirmed thanks to the leadership of the Vice-president of the Republic Francisco Santos, who presided the Inter-sectoral Commission made up by the Ministers of the Government in charge of setting the guidelines to achieve Colombia's presence at the Exhibition.

Thanks to the efforts carried out in Shanghai by Ambassador Guillermo Ricardo Velez and with the presence of Colombia's flagship "Gloria" on Chinese coasts on July 20, 2009, it was possible to sign the agreement that ensured the participation of Colombia with a pavilion strategically located between the pavilions of Peru and Brazil, across that of the United States.

Additionally, on November 13, 2009, Colombia entered into a Memorandum of Understanding between the General Commissioners of these three countries for the mutual facilitation and collaboration to participate in Expo Shanghai 2010. The Memorandum allowed extending cooperation among neighboring pavilions in different topics and events as fora, business agendas and high-level visits, among others.

The pavilion of Colombia in Expo Shanghai 2010 was the representation of our country; the Colombian Embassy to the world. The motto to reach 70 million participants was based upon the image campaign of the country "*Descubre Colombia a través de su corazón*" (Discover Colombia through its heart) shown as a captivating proposal that enabled showing the whole potential and opportunities that our home country offers the world.

In regards to the participation of Colombia at Expo, our geographical advantages were evident, since our location at the central part of the hemisphere, the ports on the coasts of the Pacific and the Atlantic oceans and the borderlines with Brazil, Venezuela, Peru, Ecuador and Panama make us the key to access South America, along with a few unique characteristics that let us show our country as a place full of huge opportunities for investors, tourists and other visitors.

All of the above brought to life the three basic pillars on which the concept of our pavilion lied on: our people, regions, and opportunities, responding to the fact that

our people are the most precious Colombian resource and our greatest equity. Thus, our human capital is in charge of generating progress which allows us to take part in a more competitive international dynamics.

Moreover, our pavilion recreated in every area the ideas of people, regions and opportunities. In the first area, the waiting room, visitors could see images and a video of Colombia focused on the geography, the culture and current situation, where the experience of getting to know the country started.

At the entrance, visitors found the “Heart of Colombia Hall”, where a magical scenario was created and awakened sensations for the visitor to become an active participant in the exhibit. This was an area that captivated, seduced and attracted the attention of the public, thanks to the recreation of our flora, fauna, idiosyncrasy and vitality.

Behind the “Cascade of Biodiversity”, sponsored by public and private entities, the “Allies Hall” was located where exhibitors displayed their material with audiovisual aids for visitors to see their projects and the investment, exports, cultural exchange and technological opportunities. In Colombia we have progressed in many areas but still have a long way to explore, thus opening possibilities for different companies and potential partners that want to participate in our development.

We also had a museum store with unique Colombian crafts and a coffee shop at the external side of the pavilion to offer our visitors and those in other stands the best cup of coffee.

Finally, Colombia’s effort at Expo Shanghai 2010 presented a prospective effort for the future: creating a chamber of commerce for Colombo-Chinese investment, with representatives of the business, guilds and academic sectors, as well as total support from the two governments. Its main purpose is to develop strategies to promote trade and investment between the two countries.

In summary, the proposal we presented from our country displayed the interest in strengthening the positive agenda of our foreign affairs policy, as well as leaving a legacy for future generations since Colombia wants to be and soon will become “the partner of choice”.

### **The path of progress**

Every exposition is a window for countries to show their very best. They are an ideal scenario to display the challenges and opportunities that mankind has for the future. In this sense, the *Bureau International des Expositions*, as an inter-governmental organization with its headquarters in France, in charge of appointing the host countries for future exhibitions, tries to ensure that every detail in the

organization of the event may leave an enduring message to fulfill the purpose of the Convention Relating to International Exhibitions, signed on November 22, 1928.

In reference to previous versions, it is important to mention that Expo Hannover 2000 under the motto "*Humankind, Nature and Technology*" had the successful participation of Colombia and the memories are still captivating, as it occurred with the Zeri pavilion of architect Simon Velez, in which the solidity and perfect symmetry of the finely assembled bamboo served as testament to the spirit of a country that does not surrender and continues striving to progress.

As Colombian Ambassador in special mission and accountable for the Colombian Pavilion at Expo Shanghai 2010, I feel honored to contribute to strengthen the ties between our country and the People's Republic of China. I can say that as from this moment, I foresee that in the year 2040, when someone is asked to write something to commemorate sixty years of the diplomatic relations and China is already the second commercial partner of Colombia, this world exposition will be remembered as the event where thousands of businesspeople strengthened bonds with a faraway country in a Caribbean, Andean, plain, amazon and pacific pavilion.