

Juan Luis Londoño

The life of Juan Luis Londoño was a constant battle in favour of better social conditions for his fellow Colombians. A battle reflected not only in life, but also through his death, on February 6, 2003 while traveling for work reasons to one of the Colombian departments.

From "paisa" origin and born on June 26, 1958 in Bogotá, Londoño led his "social" battle from very different but converging fronts --- academia, government, the international arena and journalism. From within these posts, he analyzed, designed and discussed what his friends, fellow journalists and analysts considered his greatest passions: the fight against unemployment and poverty, as well as the need to broaden coverage of both the health and pension systems with particular emphasis on the reduction of income differences among Colombians.

He studied management at the EAFIT University of Medellín and economics at Antioquia University and graduated from Los Andes University where he got his first master's in economics. He also received a master's and doctoral degree in the same field from Harvard University.

During President César Gaviria's administration, he served as Deputy Director of the National Planning Department, Secretary of the Colombian Council for Economic and Social Policy and also led the team responsible for the 1991 – 1994 National Development Plan. During the last two years of President's Gaviria he served as Minister of Health.

After his period in the government, and given his determination to defend human rights, he contributed to global development and innovation working at international organisations such as the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank.

Londoño was the first Minister to be contacted by the then president-elect, Alvaro Uribe. Knowing his abilities, Uribe made him simultaneously responsible for the Health and Labor agendas; he charged him with their fusion to create a single, large Ministry of Social Protection that would give way to a more efficient and effective social security system. Two days before his tragic accident, Londoño was sworn in as Minister of this new institution.

Londoño's main career legacy was the series of reforms to the social, economic, health and pension systems in Colombia. Reforms not only promoted by him, but successfully achieved. He inspired the creation of the Law 100, passed and approved on 1993, that consolidated the rights of citizens as regards access to medical care as well as the model for financing the health system.

Other great achievements in which he participated were the reform of the pension system, the labor reform, the work risk reform, the vaccination campaigns, and the Regional Employment Councils, all accomplished during his time as Minister, within President Alvaro Uribe's administration.

His creativity and imagination in the area of social and economic policies, spurred by his early commitment to education and investment in human capital as demonstrated by his thesis "Human Capital, Income Distribution and Growth". This work was shared in at least 15 books written by him, as well as in the 34 articles published by academic journals from around the world, including the *American Economic Review* and the *Journal of Development Economics*.

The prestigious *British Medical Journal* in its March 2003 issue, described him as a man who "had a clear vision for social policy: he strove to improve the quality of life of mothers and children, elderly and unemployed people, and the rural and urban poor. He always put citizens, especially the most vulnerable, first and valued policies based on the evidence of their effectiveness in addressing needs."

His life project was shared with his wife María Zulema Vélez and his three children: Juliana, Daniela and Juan Felipe.

President Alvaro Uribe, who trusted him with some of the most important reforms of his Administration, when bidding his last goodbye said: "Juan Luis Londoño was profound in all fields, a warrior with his ideas, direct in speech, defying established ways and preconceived notions, yet without ever slighting anyone".

The people and countries that honour him with this event, offer as a token of their deep appreciation to his legacy, as friend and expert colleague, the promise of perpetuating his mission in the search for greater equity, less poverty, and achieving universal coverage of social rights.