

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 14, 2008

The Honorable Álvaro Uribe Vélez
President of the Republic of Colombia
Palacio de Nariño
Bogotá, Colombia

Dear Mr. President:

We wish to convey our grave concern regarding threats and attacks against human rights defenders preceding and following the March 6, 2008 nationwide rally against paramilitary and other forms of violence. We urge you to take a firm and public stance in support of those who promote and protect human rights.

We are troubled that your adviser, José Obdulio Gaviria, asserted very publicly on Caracol Radio on February 10th and 11th that demonstrations organized by human rights organization on March 6th were convened at the behest of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). He also suggested that Iván Cepeda and other advocates of victims' rights were affiliated with the FARC. His statements are not only inaccurate but dangerous, and we urge you to clearly distance your government from these remarks.

We associate ourselves with the statement issued on March 13th by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights – Colombia Office expressing profound concern about the current spike in threats and murders against human rights defenders. In that statement the UNHCHR calls upon your government to guarantee prompt and effective protection of human rights defenders and leaders of grassroots organizations; and for the Attorney General's Office (*la Fiscalía*) to undertake a decisive investigation into these events. We also support the UNHCHR in emphasizing the enormous significance, especially in the present circumstances, for the highest representatives of your government to express publicly their support for "all persons and organizations that legitimately call for the fulfillment of their rights to truth, justice, reparation and the guarantees of non-repetition."

Since Mr. Gaviria's statements were made, there have been a number of threats and assassinations of civil society and community leaders. These include:

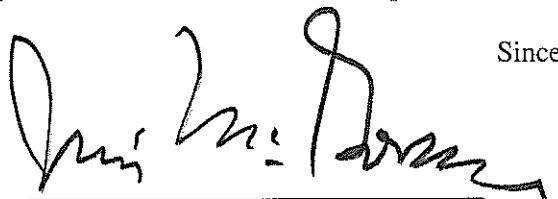
- A shooting on February 28th against the home of **Ms. Luz Adriana González**, member of the Permanent Committee for the Defense of Human Rights and an organizer of the March 6th demonstration in Pereira;
- The murder of **Edgar José Molina**, a Huipaz coordinator, on February 23rd in Algeciras, Huila;
- The murder of **Leonidas Gómez**, an employee of Citibank and leader of the National Bank Employees Union (UNEB) and the Workers Central Union (CUT), on March 5th in Bogotá;
- The murder of **Carlos Burbano**, leader of the national Association of Hospital and Clinic Workers (ANTHOC), whose body appeared on March 11th in San Vicente del Caguán, Caquetá;
- The murder of **Carmen Cecilia Carvajal**, member of the North Santander Teachers Association (ASINORT);
- The murder of **Gildardo Antonio Gómez Alzate**, delegate of the Association of Instructors of Antioquia (ADIDA) and member of the Center for Teacher Research and Study (CEID); and
- A series of physical attacks and attempted kidnappings against other human rights activists and the theft of computer equipment from the offices of the Association of Displaced Persons of Guaviare (ASPODEGUA), the National Coordination of Displaced Persons (CND), and the National Federation of Agricultural Cooperatives (FENACOA).

While these attacks focused on participants reportedly involved in the March 6th national demonstrations, Mr. Gaviria's remarks also contribute to the threatening climate in which the physical safety and work of a broad spectrum of human rights defenders, trade unionists and civic leaders have been put at risk. Human rights organizations that have received email threats since Mr. Gaviria's statements include the Association for Social Alternative Promotion (MINGA), the Corporation for the Defense and Promotion of Human Rights (REINICIAR), the Colombian Commission of Jurists, the CUT, the Consultancy for Human Rights and Displacement (CODHES), leaders of the Movement of Victims of State Crimes (MOVICE), the national Indigenous Organization of Colombia (ONIC), the Center for Investigation and Popular Education (CINEP), and the international organization Peace Brigades International/Colombia Project (PBI). These email threats were sent by groups calling themselves the Black Eagles, the latest of which declares human rights organizations and named human rights defenders to be "military targets." We also recall that in November a Medellín delegate of the OAS Mission of Support for the Peace Process (MAPP-OEA), which has been monitoring the demobilization and activities of paramilitary groups, also received a similar death threat. These threats highlight the climate of intimidation that surrounds the work of both Colombian and international organizations. They also underline the fact that paramilitary organizations still function in Colombia and that the paramilitary demobilization process has thus far failed to adequately dismantle their structures.

We welcome your February 15th Presidential Communication to guarantee the rights of those who participated in the March 6th protest. Regrettably, even after this pronouncement was issued, Mr. Gaviria continued to undermine the march's sponsoring organizations: in the February 17th edition of *El Tiempo*, Mr. Gaviria suggested that they were somehow FARC guerrilla sympathizers; and then again on March 20th, when Mr. Cepeda, director of MOVICE, made a formal petition to have Mr. Gaviria dismissed for his comments, Mr. Gaviria made a public statement to the media that "petitions made by the FARC are always considered by the Government and that is precisely what we are doing with this right to petition." Mr. Cepeda rightly expressed his distress that such statements, especially following the recent murders of four trade unionists, put his life in danger. Undeterred, on March 27th Mr. Gaviria repeated again these same accusations in response to a letter sent to you, Mr. President, by twenty-two U.S. human rights, religious and non-governmental organizations.

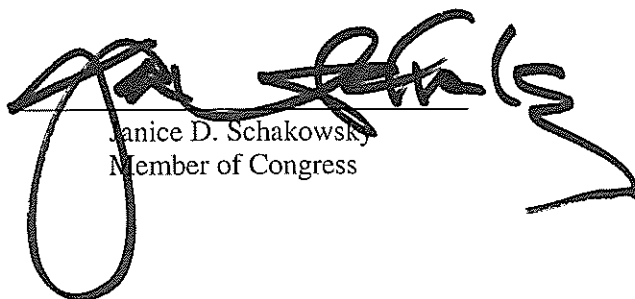
Mr. President, we believe stronger, repeated endorsement by you and the highest officials of your government on the rights of victims to denounce paramilitary violence and call for justice would help change the climate in which these threats and attacks continue to take place.

We respectfully ask that you personally reiterate the prohibition on public servants making disparaging remarks about human rights defenders enshrined in the 1999 Presidential Directive 07 and the 2001 Presidential Directive 07, and ensure that these measures are fully complied with by government officials. We also ask that you ensure a prompt and effective investigation into all of the above-noted threats, murders and other incidents. Most importantly, those who committed these crimes must be prosecuted. And finally, we urge you to publicly reject the statements made by Mr. Gaviria and reaffirm your government's commitment to the protection of human rights defenders.





James P. McGovern
Member of Congress

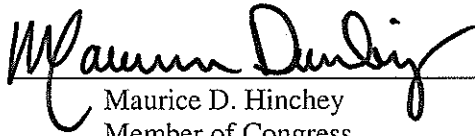
Sincerely,





Janice D. Schakowsky
Member of Congress



Howard L. Berman
Member of Congress


Joseph R. Pitts
Member of Congress

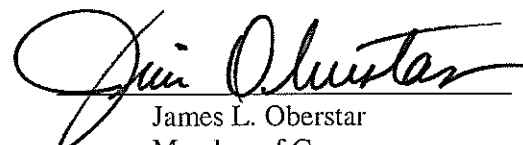

Maurice D. Hinchey
Member of Congress

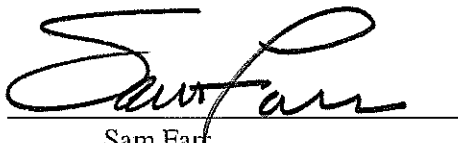

Jose E. Serrano
Member of Congress

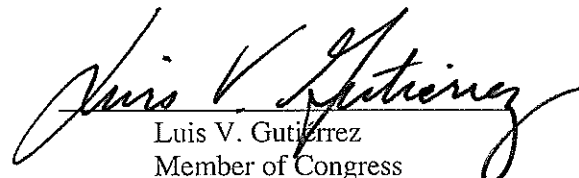

Donald M. Payne
Member of Congress

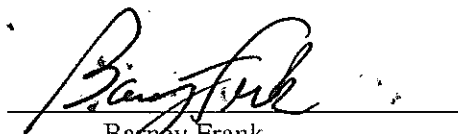

Rosa L. DeLauro
Member of Congress

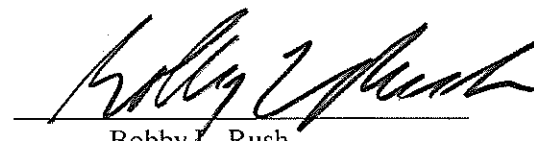

Ed Pastor
Member of Congress



James L. Oberstar
Member of Congress

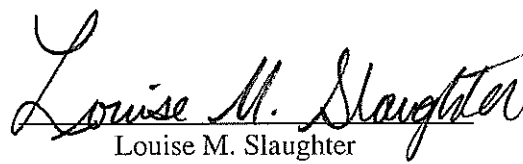

Sam Farr
Member of Congress


Luis V. Gutierrez
Member of Congress


Barney Frank
Member of Congress


Bobby L. Rush
Member of Congress


George Miller
Member of Congress


Louise M. Slaughter
Member of Congress

Marcy Kaptur
Marcy Kaptur
Member of Congress

Danny K. Davis
Danny K. Davis
Member of Congress

Lynn C. Woolsey
Lynn C. Woolsey
Member of Congress

Chaka Fattah
Chaka Fattah
Member of Congress

Barbara Lee
Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

Tammy Baldwin
Tammy Baldwin
Member of Congress

Maxine Waters
Maxine Waters
Member of Congress

Peter DeFazio
Peter DeFazio
Member of Congress

Henry A. Waxman
Henry A. Waxman
Member of Congress

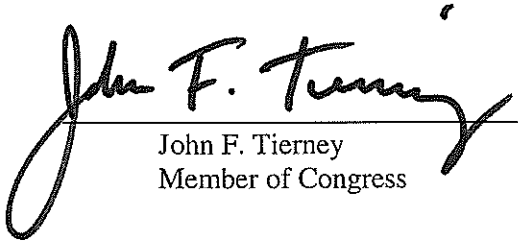
Earl Blumenauer
Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress

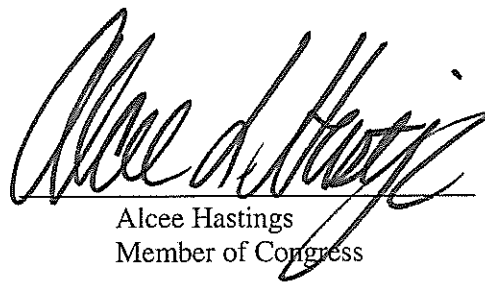
John Conyers, Jr.
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Member of Congress

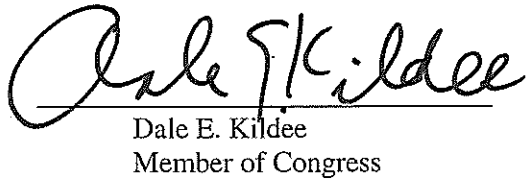
Edward J. Markey
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Member of Congress

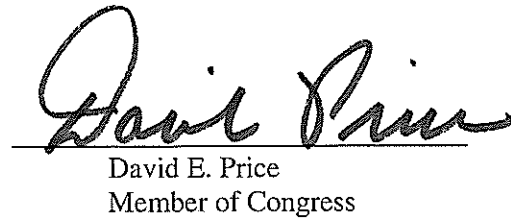
Robert Wexler
Robert Wexler
Member of Congress

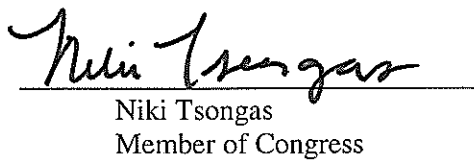
Elijah E. Cummings
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Member of Congress

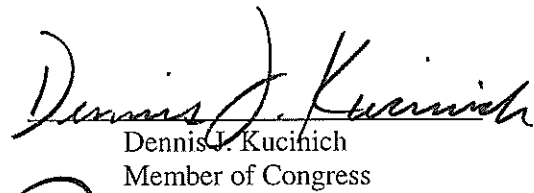

John F. Tierney
Member of Congress

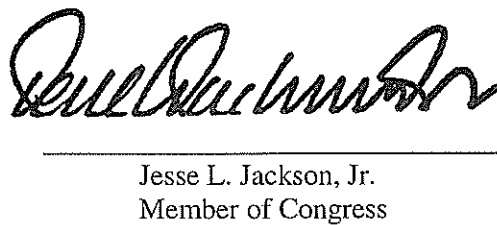

Alcee Hastings
Member of Congress

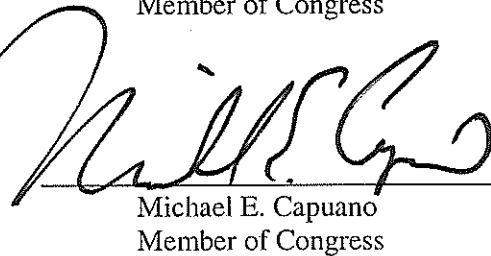

Dale E. Kildee
Member of Congress

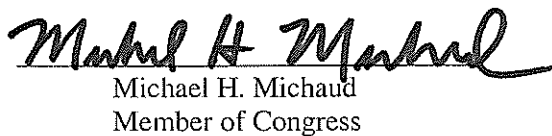

David E. Price
Member of Congress


Niki Tsongas
Member of Congress

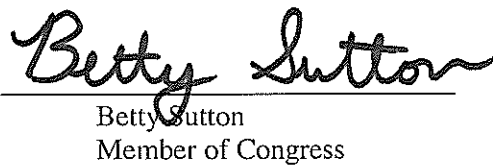

Dennis J. Kucinich
Member of Congress

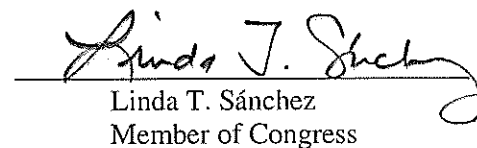

Jesse L. Jackson, Jr.
Member of Congress

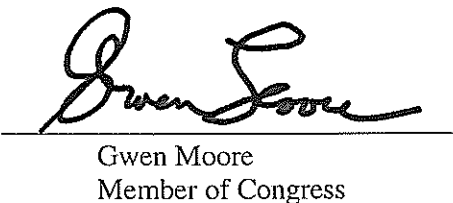

Michael E. Capuano
Member of Congress

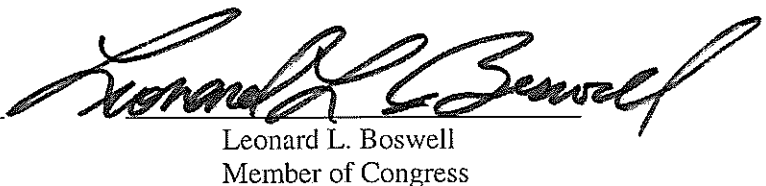

Michael H. Michaud
Member of Congress


Phil Hare
Member of Congress

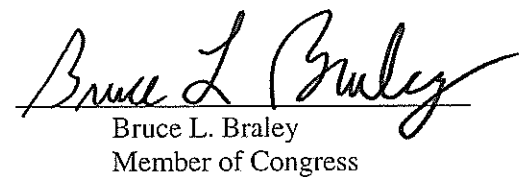

Betty Sutton
Member of Congress


Linda T. Sánchez
Member of Congress


Gwen Moore
Member of Congress

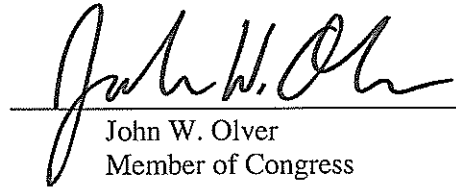

Leonard L. Boswell
Member of Congress


Keith Ellison
Member of Congress

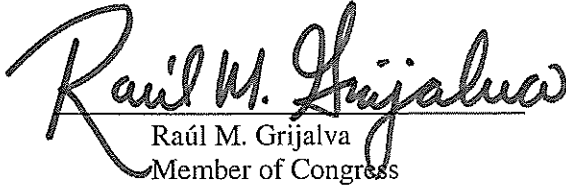

Bruce L. Braley
Member of Congress



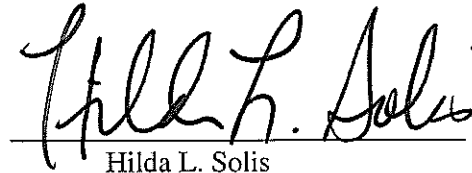
Betty McCollum
Member of Congress



John W. Olver
Member of Congress



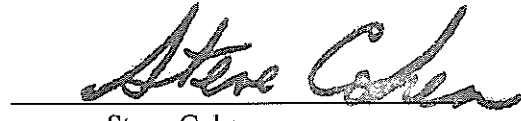
Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress



Hilda L. Solis
Member of Congress



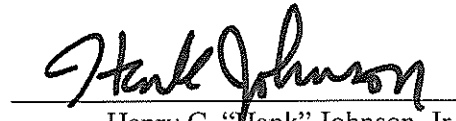
Lois Capps
Member of Congress



Steve Cohen
Member of Congress



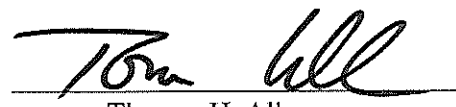
Rush D. Holt
Member of Congress



Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.
Member of Congress



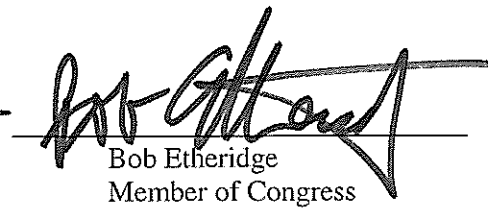
Carol Shea-Porter
Member of Congress



Thomas H. Allen
Member of Congress



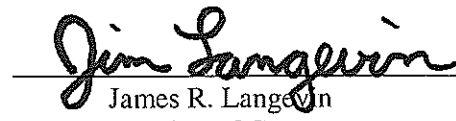
Michael M. Honda
Member of Congress



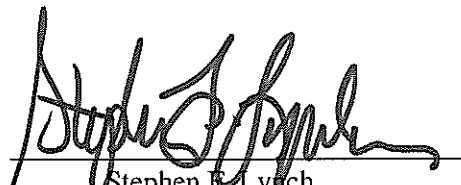
Bob Etheridge
Member of Congress



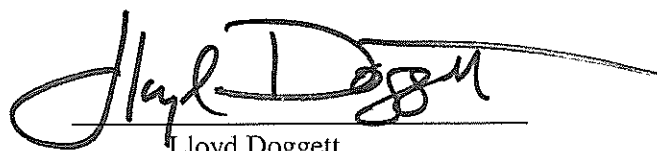
Zoe Lofgren
Member of Congress



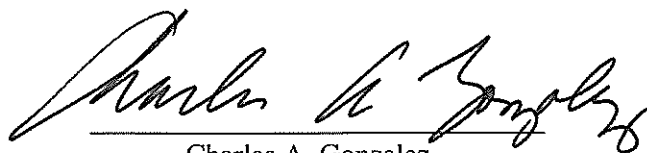
James R. Langevin
Member of Congress



Stephen F. Lynch
Member of Congress



Lloyd Doggett
Member of Congress



Charles A. Gonzalez
Member of Congress

Member of Congress

cc: Francisco Santos Calderón, Vice-President, Republic of Colombia
Ambassador Carolina Barco, Embassy of Colombia
Condoleezza Rice, U.S. Secretary of State
Thomas A. Shannon, Jr., Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs
Jonathan Farrar, Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights, Democracy and Labor
William R. Brownfield, U.S. Ambassador to Colombia