

To: Members of Congress

May 1, 2007

Recommendations for U.S. Policy in Colombia: Military Aid to Colombia is Not Justified

We are writing to you as representatives of grassroots organizations with members from across the United States to urge you to lead a change in U.S. policy toward Colombia, and terminate US military aid. Such aid has failed in its stated aims, reinforced impunity for human rights violations, and contributed to the displacement of millions of Colombians.

The current policy's mechanisms for separating the State from illegal paramilitary groups and protecting human and labor rights do not work. On April 4, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice signed a document certifying the Colombian armed forces fulfillment of human rights conditions in the "Leahy law." The conditions include the requirement that: "the Colombian government is vigorously investigating and prosecuting those members of the Colombian armed forces, of whatever rank, who have been credibly alleged to... have aided or abetted paramilitary organizations."

Secretary Rice submitted the document to Congress less than two weeks after *The Los Angeles Times* disclosed a CIA report stating that the chief of the Colombian Army, General Mario Montoya Uribe, had collaborated with paramilitary groups in 2002 in an operation that resulted in the deaths of 14 civilians and over a dozen disappearances. The CIA report also cited the U.S. military attaché in Bogotá, who said that the report "confirms information provided by a proven source" and that information from the source "also could implicate" armed forces chief Freddy Padilla de Leon. Reports of General Montoya's history of paramilitary collaboration date back to the late 1970s and continued in the 1990s.

The most disturbing aspect of the affair is that the State Department had "vetted" General Montoya for placement in a high-profile counter-narcotics command in 2000 as part of Plan Colombia. Yet the 59-page certification document made no mention whatsoever of reports of General Montoya's collaboration with paramilitary groups, nor of any investigation of the data in the CIA report.

General Montoya is not the only case of collusion with paramilitary forces to undertake serious human rights violations. In another high-level example of state-paramilitary collaboration, Colombia's intelligence services compiled lists of union members and human rights activists and gave them to paramilitaries, who then carried out assassinations, according to captured documents and a key witness. The former chief of the secret police was jailed in February 2007 for these charges, and subsequently released. Yet, while the abuses were occurring and the security agencies were benefiting from Plan Colombia, the State Department regularly certified Colombian compliance with human rights conditions.

These are among a widening series of revelations that, since November 2006, has mired Colombia in one of its most serious political scandals directly linking state and military officials to the paramilitary United Self Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), a U.S.-designated International Terrorist Organization. In spite of the demobilization and amnesty for members of the AUC, paramilitary groups have re-armed or did not disarm in 14 of Colombia's 32 departments, according to a recent report by the Organization of American States, while the lands illegally taken by paramilitaries through forced displacements of civilians have not been returned.

Other recent revelations show the corruption and disregard for human rights in many levels of the Colombian Army. The publicly documented revelations include: torture of army cadets as punishment for missing an exercise; summary execution of civilian peasants and asserting they were guerrillas killed in combat; and army intelligence officers coordinating bomb attacks in Bogota on the eve of President Uribe's second inauguration and claiming that guerrillas were responsible. The United Nations reported an increase in the number of extrajudicial executions by the Army in 2006.

During his recent visit to Colombia, President Bush focused on promoting a controversial NAFTA-style free trade agreement with Colombia. Yet he did not publicly raise the problem of violence against trade unionists, human rights defenders, women, or the impunity in which many violations remain, although the Colombian armed forces have the worst human rights record in this hemisphere and Colombia is by far the world's most dangerous country for trade unionists. The message this sends to the Colombian military, should aid to it continue, is that it is immune to prosecution for these crimes. While the investigations of links between state officials and paramilitary terrorist groups is a positive sign, it has not come about as a result of initiative by the military or President Uribe, but because of the discovery of a paramilitary leader's laptop documenting in painful detail the para-political links and subsequent action taken by the Supreme Court and attorney general.

The United States should not support armed forces and a government with ties with armed groups designated by the State Department as terrorists. We believe that percentage cuts in military aid do not go far enough in addressing the fundamental problems with assistance to the Colombian military. Because of apparently pervasive infiltration of the Colombian state by paramilitary terrorist agents and the failure of legislative mechanisms such as the certification process to address this infiltration, **we urge Congress to cut military aid entirely**. There is no justification for any aid to the Colombian Army.

Moreover, military aid has been completely ineffective in achieving its principle policy goal of reducing illicit drug use. The impact on the price of drugs and the amount of land planted with coca has been nil. "The most recent data released by the State Department," the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported in March, "show that more land was cultivated with coca in 2005 -- 144,000 acres -- than when the effort began in 2000." Meanwhile, despite \$4.7 billion spent on Plan Colombia, retail cocaine prices have fallen and purity has increased between 2003 and 2006, according to the White House Office on National Drug Control Policy. Yet, Plan Colombia has resulted in massive displacement of civilians, environmental degradation, and the institutionalization of gains in power made by paramilitary terrorist groups.

Congress can usefully start by banning training of the Colombian armed forces. The United States trains more than 10,000 Colombian soldiers a year, and more Colombians attend the US Army School of the Americas (renamed the Western Hemisphere Institute of Security Cooperation in 2001) than from any other country. There is historical precedence for Congress to ban military training to US allies because of gross violations of human rights - specifically, in Indonesia for its role in East Timor, and Guatemala. US training of both nations' militaries was suspended for more than 10 years. The ban on training occurred while the level of violations in each was substantially less than that documented currently for the Colombian armed forces.

Congress should re-cast U.S. policy in Colombia and articulate goals consistent with the values of respect for human rights. Because the fundamental causes of the armed conflict in Colombia are political and economic, the United States should support comprehensive negotiations for an end to the armed conflict with guerrilla forces, fully involving Colombian civil society. Promotion

of respect for human rights and the rule of law should be at the forefront of policy, by conditioning economic aid on effective action to end impunity for human rights violations and collaboration with paramilitary groups. US drug policy should be re-oriented toward programs for demand reduction in the United States.

We are eager to work with you to make these policy changes a reality. Thank you in advance for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,

National Organizations and Leaders

Fellowship of Reconciliation

**United Methodist Church
General Board of Church and Society**

Global Exchange

School of the Americas Watch

Witness for Peace

Amazon Watch

Code Pink

U.S. Office on Colombia

**Association for the Sovereignty of
Colombia, ASOCOL**

**Network in Solidarity with the People of
Guatemala**

Quixote Center/Quest for Peace

Alliance for Responsible Trade

**Baptist Peace Fellowship of North
America**

Buddhist Peace Fellowship

Episcopal Peace Fellowship

Lutheran Peace Fellowship

Presbyterian Peace Fellowship

**U.S./Labor Education in the Americas
Project**

Angela Berryman

Interim Assistant General Secretary for
Peace and Conflict Resolution
American Friends Service Committee

Rev. Mari Castellanos
Justice and Witness Ministries
United Church of Christ

Alfred Marder, President
U.S. Peace Council

Katherine Hoyt, Co-Coordinator
Nicaragua Network

Regional and Local Organizations and
Leaders

Colombia Human Rights Committee
Washington, DC

WESPAC Foundation
White Plains, NY

Chicagoans for a Peaceful Colombia

Gary L. Cozette, Director
**Chicago Religious Leadership Network
on Latin America**

Chicago Metropolitan Sanctuary Alliance

Lawrence Bragman
Mayor
Fairfax, California

**Marin Interfaith Task Force on the
Americas**

Ella Baker Center for Human Rights
Oakland, California

Pace e Bene Nonviolence Service
Oakland, California

Elizabeth Martinez, Director
Institute of Multiracial Justice
San Francisco, CA

Peaceworkers
San Francisco, California

Ilise Cohen
Interfaith Peace Builders

Colombia Peace Project
Los Angeles, California

James Odling
Green Party County Council
Los Angeles, California