

July 22, 2010

Office of the Secretary General
José Miguel Insulza
Organization of American States
1889 F Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20006

Dear Secretary General José Miguel Insulza,

We, the undersigned, wish to express our grave concern regarding the recent attempt by the Uribe Administration to thwart progress in the establishment of a constructive regional dialogue around the internal conflict in Colombia and its impact on neighboring countries. We consider this dialogue - based on mutual trust and respect - to be essential to the construction of a lasting peace in Colombia and to regional stability.

Civil society organizations in the United States and in Latin America, as well as regional bodies including the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), have worked tirelessly to open doors for dialogue and seek a more comprehensive approach to Colombia's bloody 60 year old civil war. Unfortunately, the Uribe government has focused instead on a policy of increased militarization that has claimed an enormous human and material toll, especially for Colombia's Afrodescendant and indigenous communities.

The Uribe administration leaves behind it a dismal human rights record that is the direct product of the so-called democratic security policy first implemented in 2003. Along with over 20,000 deaths of combatants, thousands of civilian non-combatants have been killed according to human rights groups. Over 2000 extrajudicial killings allegedly perpetrated by Colombia's armed forces are currently under investigation by the country's Prosecutor-General. Meanwhile, the number of internally displaced in Colombia has reached the millions and hundreds of thousands of Colombians have sought exile in neighboring countries.

President Uribe also leaves a sad record in the foreign policy realm given the troubling actions his government has taken in the regional arena and his refusal to consult affected countries before taking these actions. His government's decision in 2008 to invade and bomb Ecuadoran territory without any regard for that country's sovereignty led to a regional crisis that continues to have repercussions to this day. His decision in 2009 to sign an agreement with the United States that greatly enhances the US' military presence in Colombia, has led to further tensions with countries throughout South America that are historically wary of any form of US military build up in the region.

In recent days, President Uribe has once again chosen to provoke a neighbor - in this case Venezuela - rather than engage in much needed dialogue. With his government's decision to dust off repeated accusations against the Chavez government at a crucial moment of transition that offers a unique opportunity for putting relations with Venezuela on a new path, Uribe has once again demonstrated that he prefers conflict to dialogue.

Yet we wish nonetheless to express our hope that Colombia's internal situation and external relations can and will improve. Colombia's president elect - Juan Manuel Santos - undoubtedly bears a share of the responsibility for the security policies implemented by Uribe, given that he was Colombia's defense minister from 2006 to 2009. However, his recent statements - if they are to be believed - suggest that he may be willing to turn a new page. It is our hope, both for Colombia and for the future stability of the region that once in office, Mr. Santos will seek to significantly revise the harmful security policies put in place by President Uribe and work in earnest to rebuild relations with the rest of the region.

With the inauguration of a new Colombian president less than a month away, hope for real change in Colombia lies on the horizon. We strongly urge the future Colombian administration to foster improved dialogue within Colombia as well as with neighboring countries as they move forward in constructing a more peaceful and democratic nation. Nothing less is owed to the thousands of Colombians who have been victims of this bloody conflict or who have been displaced or exiled in foreign lands for more than half a century.

Sincerely,

Father Roy Bourgeois, School of the Americas Watch

Chuck Kaufman, Alliance for Global Justice

Alfred L. Marder, US Peace Council

Gene Bruskin, US Labor Against the War

Medea Benjamin, CODEPINK: Women for Peace

Lisa Fuller, Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador

Dale Sorenson, Marin Inter-Faith Task Force on the Americas

Mark Weisbrot, Center for Economic Policy and Research

cc: Chair of the Permanent Council, Ambassador Joaquín Maza

Assistant Secretary General, Albert R. Ramdin,

Deborah-Mae Lovell, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Antigua and Barbuda

Martín Gómez Bustillo, Interim Representative of Argentina

Cornelius A. Smith, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of The Bahamas

John E. Beale, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Barbados

Nestor Mendez, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Belize

José Enrique Pinelo Navarro, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Bolivia

Ruy de Lima Casães e Silva, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Brazil

Graeme Clark, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Canada

Darío Paya, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Chile

Luis Alfonso Hoyos Aristizábal, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Colombia

José Enrique Castillo Barrantes, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Costa Rica
Hubert J. Charles , Ambassador of Dominica
Virgilio Alcántara, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of the Dominican Republic
Francisco Proaño, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Ecuador
Joaquín Maza, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of El Salvador
Gillian M.S. Bristol, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Grenada
Jorge Skinner-Klee, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Guatemala
Bayney R. Karran, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Guyana
Duly Brutus Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Haiti
Audrey Patrice Marks, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Jamaica
Gustavo Albin Santos, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Mexico
Denis Ronaldo Moncada Colindres, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Nicaragua
Guillermo Alberto Cochez Farrugia, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Panama
Bernardino Hugo Saguier, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Paraguay
Hugo de Zela Martínez, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Peru
Izben C. Williams, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Saint Kitts and Nevis Michael
Louis, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Saint Lucia
La Celia A. Prince, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
Jacques Ruben Constantijn Kross, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Suriname
Glenda Morean-Phillip, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Trinidad and Tobago
Carmen Lomellin, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of the United States
María del Luján Flores, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Uruguay
Roy Chaderton Matos, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Venezuela