



Secretary General Jose Miguel Insulza
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Dear Secretary General Insulza,

We write to express concern regarding the most recent attempt by the Uribe Administration to thwart progress in the establishment of a regional dialogue around the internal conflict and security in Colombia and its impact on neighboring countries. This dialogue-based on mutual trust and respect- is essential to the construction of a lasting peace in Colombia, attention to the ongoing internal displacement crisis and 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 Afro-descendant and Indigenous communities.

Despite the Uribe Administration's *democratic security policy*, illegal armed military groups (including the FARC and re-invigorated paramilitaries) have become increasingly active. Along with over 20,000 deaths of combatants, human rights groups estimate thousands of civilian non-combatants have been killed. This insecurity has disproportionately affected Afro-Colombian and Indigenous communities, fueled intimidation and assassinations of labor and human rights defenders and augmented the internal displacement in Colombia. Afro-Colombian communities have fought for equal security and protection under the law but to date, both Law 70 (Law of the Black Communities), Auto 005 (Constitutional Court finding on Previous Consultation) have frequently been overlooked.

These military solutions have been harmful, particularly towards Colombia's most marginal communities. The signing of the US-Colombia military base agreement shows a continued commitment to these policies. In his final days, Uribe has accused Venezuela of tolerating the "continued and permanent" presence of top leftist rebel leaders. Such accusations will further challenge any chance at normalizing relations with a neighbor that has a commitment in a peaceful Colombia.

The inauguration of Juan Manuel Santos must signal a new path for security and stability in the region. We encourage President-elect Santos to facilitate greater dialogue within Colombia as well as with regional countries as they move to construct a more peaceful, secure and democratic nation.

Regards,

Nicole C. Lee, Esq
President

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