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# United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 205104225

October 22, 2003

The Honorable Alvaro Uribe Vélez  
Presidente  
Republica de Colombia  
Bogota, Colombia

Dear Mr. President:

I regret that a last-minute change in my schedule prevented my meeting with you during your recent visit to Washington.

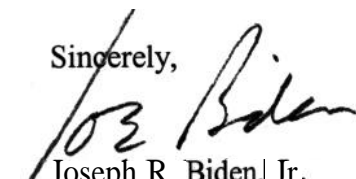
I have noted with interest the important progress that your government has made in reducing cultivation of illicit narcotics, as well as in improving the level of security in areas of the country. I sincerely hope that these trends continue; I recognize the difficulty that you face in addressing the many challenges confronting Colombia.

At the same time, I want to express my concern regarding several statements made in your speech at the inauguration ceremony of Air Force General Edgar Alfonso Lesmez last month. You stated, among many assertions, that some human rights defenders in Colombia are "spokespersons for terrorism" and "traffickers for human rights".

I am deeply troubled about your comments, and their potential effect on the safety of human rights defenders in your country, and those working for international organizations who may travel to Colombia. As you know, a wide range of civil society workers in Colombia continue to be intimidated and threatened daily, living in constant fear for their lives. The State Department's annual report on human rights for 2002 states that seventeen activists were killed or disappeared last year. I fear that your remarks, which may be construed as indiscriminately condemning the work of human rights defenders, could further endanger these workers.

I know you are deeply committed to democracy in Colombia and recognize the fundamental role that civil society plays in the process of creating a climate of security and stability in Colombia. I hope that your recent statements do not indicate a shift in your support for human rights defenders and their work. I respectfully request that you speak publicly in Colombia to reassure human rights groups in Colombia of their indispensable value, and make every effort, through your words and actions, of ensuring their physical security and ability to work freely, without threat and intimidation, in Colombia. ,

Sincerely,



Joseph R. Biden, Jr.  
Ranking Minority Member