

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510

July 26, 2004

President Álvaro Uribe Vélez
Palacio de Nariño
Government of Colombia
Santa Fé de Bogotá, Colombia

Dear President Uribe:

We write to convey the importance we place on Colombia's progress in implementing the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights' (UNHCHR) recommendations on Colombia, issued annually in March.

We first want to commend you and your government for agreeing in Geneva and again in London in July 2003 to implement these recommendations. We appreciate your dedication to establishing a secure future for Colombians and understand the difficult and complex challenges you face. We are encouraged by the decline in the level of homicides, massacres, kidnappings and forced displacement. However, we remain deeply concerned about the continued levels of violence directed at the civilian population. There are reports of increased violations, such as extrajudicial killings and forced disappearances, attributed directly to Colombian security forces. In addition, guerrillas continued their indiscriminate use of explosive devices against civilians while paramilitary forces carried out assassinations and massacres despite the existence of a cease fire. We believe that an adherence to UNHCHR's recommendations will help to establish the "democratic security" for all Colombians to which you are personally committed.

The most urgent of UNHCHR's recommendations is to cut ties between the army and paramilitary forces engaged in abuses, by suspending, investigating and vigorously prosecuting officials engaged in such collaboration. The UN report released in March 2004 cites lack of compliance with this goal, including "paramilitary operations with inexcusable knowledge of the security forces, undue contacts between civil authorities and paramilitary commanders... inaction on the part of the security forces in spite of the existence of fixed paramilitary bases close to military installations, and even the alleged provision of information to paramilitary groups by members of the police regarding possible targets."

As you know, addressing these abuses requires impartial and effective justice. UNHCHR highlights problems "relating to access to justice, judicial independence and impartiality, judicial guarantees and presumption of innocence." We remain concerned about the commitment of the Attorney General's office to investigate high-level officials implicated in human rights violations

and links to paramilitary groups. The UN has called for strengthening the witness and victims' protection program, strengthening the Human Rights Unit, and creating a unit specializing in the investigation of army-paramilitary links. While we are aware that the Attorney General has committed to establishing this unit, we hope you will increase your government's attention to the other recommendations related to fighting impunity that remain unmet.

The United Nations also raises important points regarding the vulnerability of human rights defenders, journalists and union leaders. Your government's protection program for human rights and union leaders is important. However, progress investigating and prosecuting threats and attacks against such leaders is essential. Among recent cases is the April 1st assassination of political leader and human rights activist Carlos Bernal, who had been included in the protection program, along with his bodyguard; a May 4th break-in to the Civil Society Permanent Assembly for Peace office by hooded armed men; and the April 15th assassination of Carlos Alberto Chicaiza, a public sector union leader threatened for speaking out for his union's rights.

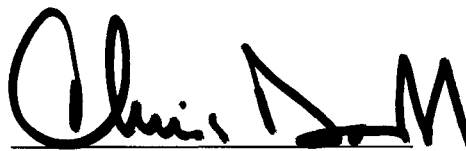
Finally, human rights, church, and union leaders have also been targeted for searches and detentions, sometimes upon faulty information provided by paid informants. The UNHCHR has urged the Colombian government to act upon a long-standing request by human rights groups for an annual review of military intelligence records to purge faulty information, and to establish more systematic channels of communication with human rights defenders. It has also called on the government to "ensure that no generalized public statements are made which might serve to endanger the rights of people involved in the defense of human rights or in trade union movements."

Thank you for your consideration.

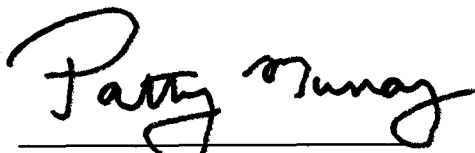
Sincerely,



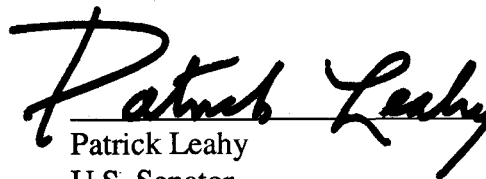
Russell Feingold
U.S. Senator




Christopher Dodd
U.S. Senator




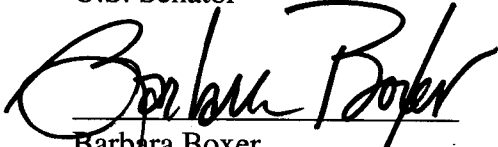
Patty Murray
U.S. Senator

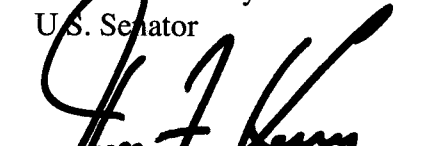



Patrick Leahy
U.S. Senator



Richard Durbin
U.S. Senator

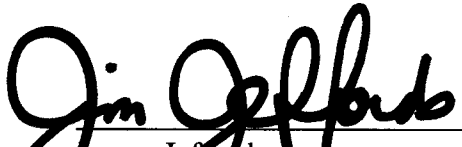

Edward Kennedy
U.S. Senator

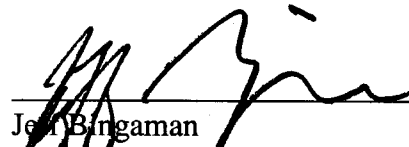

Barbara Boxer
U.S. Senator



John Kerry
U.S. Senator

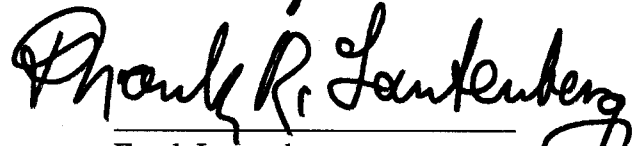

Maria Cantwell
U.S. Senator



Tom Harkin
U.S. Senator

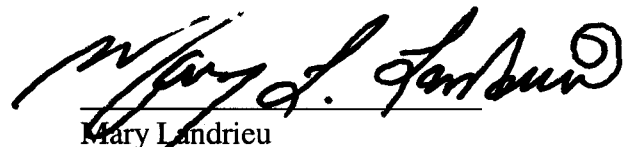

James Jeffords
U.S. Senator

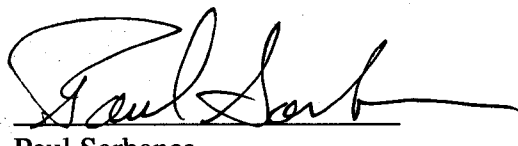

Jeff Bingaman
U.S. Senator

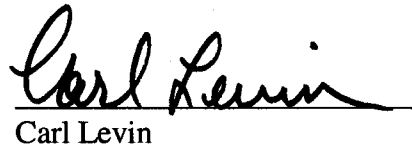

Barbara Mikulski
U.S. Senator



Frank Lautenberg
U.S. Senator


Herb Kohl
U.S. Senator

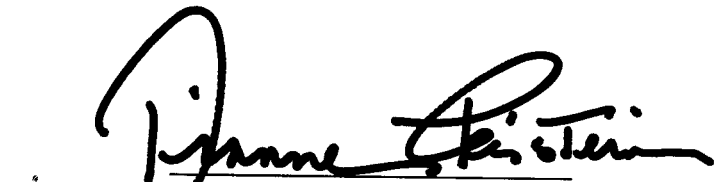

Mary Landrieu
U.S. Senator


Paul Sarbanes
U.S. Senator

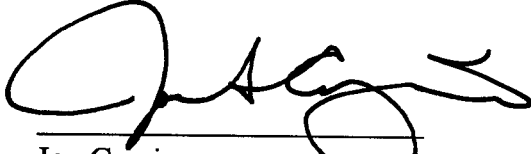

Carl Levin
U.S. Senator




Jack Reed
U.S. Senator



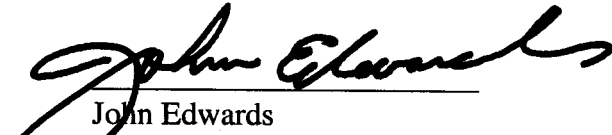
Dianne Feinstein
U.S. Senator



Jon Corzine
U.S. Senator



Mark Dayton
U.S. Senator



John Edwards
U.S. Senator