

December 1, 2004

President George W. Bush
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

President Álvaro Uribe
Palacio De Narifio
Bogotá, Colombia

Dear President Bush and President Uribe:

I was pleased to see in your recent press conference in Cartagena the renewal of friendship and a commitment of assistance between the United States and Colombia. A strong bilateral relationship is crucial to overcome the complicated problems of Colombia's internal civil conflict that has resulted from Colombia's decades long conflict.

As a former Peace Corps volunteer in Medellín, Colombia, I hold Colombia and the people of Colombia close to my heart. I was actively involved in the House Appropriations Committee discussions regarding the development of Plan Colombia and have carefully followed its implementation. As one of the Congressional leaders on Colombia issues, I offer my perspective on what I think must comprise the tenants of a "Plan Colombia II:"

Parity between US military and economic/development assistance

Just as the example of Iraq shows, military action does not alone create sustainable peace. The vast majority of US assistance (approximately 80%) and 4% of CoG expenditure is focused on military activities. President Uribe, you have made great strides in increasing security in many areas of Colombia, but now an equal effort to "win the peace" must be undertaken. While military and police action increases government control of regions previously held by the guerillas and paramilitaries and creates more regions of relative calm, expanding the economic opportunities of Colombians so they can earn a livable wage is the key to creating a sustainable peace. US assistance and CoG policy must balance economic and development assistance with security needs. Providing parity in funding between military assistance and development and economic assistance is a necessary step in rebuilding a strong Colombia.

With funding for the six year Plan Colombia winding down, as noted in the FY05 Foreign Operations Appropriations Subcommittee report, "*the Committee anticipates a decrease in the President's budget request for the 2006 for the Andean Counterdrug Initiative for Colombia,*" it is imperative that every dollar of assistance is balanced between development and economic assistance and military aid in regions retaken by the Colombian Army. Military gains can only be sustained by establishing a strong government presence and economic opportunities in these recently retaken regions.

Colombianization

The CoG must increase its percentage of GDP on security and development assistance. The FY05 Foreign Operations Appropriations committee report states: "*...the Committee supports the President of Colombia and the Colombian government's efforts to collect the additional resources needed to invest in the military, police and social programs to restore order and to give Colombians better access to services.*"

I urge the US to ensure compliance by the CoG to this Congressional directive. The CoG cannot continue to rely on the US to fund its national security budget. While the CoG has made efforts to increase taxation, Colombia still has a relatively low rate of taxation and its inability to collect tax impedes any momentum against insurgent groups and the ability to create sustainable economic growth throughout the country. Efforts to improve this problem would reaffirm to the US Congress, and other international donors, Colombia's commitment to create a sustainable revenue source and its efforts to comprehensively confront the expenses of an internal conflict.

In tandem with the need for Colombia to increase its own financial security and development resources, the CoG must undertake further reform of its military and national police, both of which report to Minister of Defense Uribe. President Uribe, as you and I have discussed, the Naval Postgraduate School, located in my congressional district, has been providing educational and technical assistance to the Ministry of Defense on defense budgeting, procurement policy and civil-military affairs. I am pleased this initiative has proven useful to Colombian Ministry of Defense officials, and I know, President Bush, that you join me in encouraging Colombia to continue to implement such structural military and national police reforms.

While the US has increased the number of US personnel, both military and civilian, allowed in Colombia at any given time, the focus of the US effort must remain on *training* and capacity building. And Colombia should redouble its efforts to incorporate USG training into its own military training. With this thinking in mind, it is my belief that retention of US-trained Colombian helicopter pilots in the Colombia National Police force is problematic. The CoG must address this issue quickly.

Beyond the military, the CoG must commit itself to ensuring that contract jobs funded by the US and that are currently held by US or other foreign national citizens are assumed by Colombians. Systemic reform of the public sector can only be successful if Colombians are invested in their own country and institutions.

Equitable development

According to Colombian government statistics, 64.3% of Colombians are currently living below the poverty line. In rural areas, the percentage of people living below the poverty line climbs to 85.3%. In order to create a united, peaceful Colombia, the outlying regions of Colombia must be included in any new US assistance plan. These predominately rural regions have been hard hit by poverty and structural socio-economic imbalances. It is vital that the Colombian government plan comprehensively to "win the peace" in rural areas of the country that have been cleared of rebels and/or paramilitaries. As noted above, this necessitates

increasing funds for alternative development, job creation, rural infrastructure development and access to markets.

Human Rights and the Rule of Law

Colombia can only truly become a peaceful, stable nation when it recognizes the human rights of all its citizens. I encourage you to take actions that will emphasize the legitimacy of human rights defenders and other civil society actors, include trade unions, women's groups, IDPs, and indigenous peoples, and to abide by the Rule of Law. Additionally, the Colombian government must continue to sever any links between government forces and paramilitary groups.

As the next phase of "Plan Colombia II" is developed, I look forward to working with your Administration, President Bush, and with you, President Uribe, to restore Colombia to its rightful place as a peaceful hemispheric leader.

I wish both of you and your families a joyous holiday season.

Sincerely,

SAM FARR
Member of Congress

Cc:

Ambassador Luis Alberto Moreno

Ambassador William B. Wood

Minister of Defense Jorge Alberto Uribe Echavarria

Gen. Bantz J Craddock, Commander, US SOUTHCOM

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