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United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4904

December 20, 2004

The Honorable William B. Wood
U.S. Ambassador to Colombia
APO AA34038
Embassy of Colombia
Bogotá, Colombia

Dear Ambassador Wood:

I am writing to call your attention to a number of issues of great concern to my constituents and to me. I am heartened to see recent statistics showing a decline in homicides and kidnappings in Colombia, as well as an increase in state control over Colombian territory. Despite these positive signs, however, serious problems remain in Colombia related to impunity and the vulnerability of human rights defenders and other activists. I also want to bring to your attention recent incidents involving the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó.

Of particular concern are the recent peace negotiations underway between the government of Colombia and the paramilitaries of the United Self-Defense Forces (AUC). I urge you to continue encouraging the Colombian government to ensure that demobilizing paramilitary members accused of crimes against humanity are held accountable for their crimes, yield their stolen land and assets, and contribute to the permanent dismantling of the AUC command, financing and support networks. Furthermore, I am concerned by reports of persistent paramilitary violations of an agreed-upon cease-fire with the Colombian government, as well as the presence at the negotiating table of fugitive narco-traffickers who have bought their way into the AUC in order to evade punishment. I request that you provide my office with an accounting, by program, purpose, and funding source, of any support that the United States is currently providing to the AUC peace negotiations.

Second, I am disturbed by the continuing targeting of union leaders, human rights defenders and other activists in Colombia. It appears that despite the existence of the U.S.- supported human rights protection program, killings of activists continue at a frightening pace, and the frequency of these attacks has in fact increased. I ask that you continue to send a firm message to the Colombian government about the importance to the United States of these defenders' safety. I also urge you to meet with these groups frequently in order to hear their concerns and to make clear that their safety is an important U.S. priority.

Finally, I want to bring to your attention an issue reported to me by the Colombia Support Network, a national organization headquartered in Madison, Wisconsin. My constituents in Dane County, Wisconsin have a sister-city relationship with the Peace Community of San José

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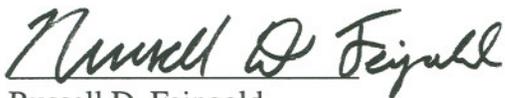
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de Apartadó, in the Urabá region of northwest Colombia. Residents of the Peace Community report that on October 2, 2004, a member of this Peace Community, Yorbeli Amparo Restrepo Flores, was killed by paramilitaries on a road between Apartado and San José de Apartadó. This occurred even though the XVII Army Brigade of the Colombian army maintains a checkpoint on that road and patrols it regularly. My constituents believe the murder resulted from collaboration between the paramilitaries and the Colombian armed forces. Since this incident occurred, my office has also received information that the paramilitaries have blockaded the Peace Community and are stopping traffic, seizing provisions and merchandise from vehicles, and threatening individuals with death if they transport food, water or other goods to and from San José de Apartadó.

My constituents and I are greatly concerned that paramilitaries continue to act with impunity in San José de Apartadó and elsewhere in Colombia. The Peace Community of San José de Apartadó is the subject of protective measures from the Inter-American Court, which the Colombian Constitutional Court reaffirmed in April 2004. The Colombian Constitutional Court decision orders the Colombian government to protect the residents of the Peace Community. I ask that you urge the Colombian government to respect the neutrality of the Peace Community, to protect the residents as ordered, and to investigate the death of Yorbeli Amparo.

I appreciate your attention to these concerns, and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Russell D. Feingold
U.S. Senator