

Action on Colombia

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ANOTHER WAR FOR GLOBALIZATION

by Cecilia Zárate-Laun

The United States Government pursued a policy of bombing Yugoslavia, supposedly to curb human rights abuses by the state security and military apparatus of President Slobodan Milosevic. Yet in Colombia, the same U.S. government supports an army that has long been engaged in very serious human rights abuses in collaboration with paramilitary death squads. In fact, Colombia is the third largest recipient of U.S. military aid, after Israel and Egypt. These death squads target teachers, members of legal political movements, priests, nuns, human rights leaders, labor leaders, journalists, academics and thousands of peasants. While the U.S. government supported the KLA rebels to stop ethnic cleansing in Kosovo, it indirectly and knowingly provides support to paramilitaries in Colombia engaged in similar "cleansing" activities.

Why don't we hear more about the situation in Colombia? First, because the Colombian government, unlike Milosevic's government, is considered "friendly" to the U.S. Secondly, the U.S. government is intentionally misleading in its public pronouncements on the

reasons for the war in Colombia. Rather than a "War on Drugs" featuring the Colombian army and police against drug traffickers and guerrillas, the conflict in Colombia is a class war which has been underway for about 60 years as the product of a very exclusionary society that does not willingly accept social, political and economic reforms.

The facts behind U.S. policy in both Yugoslavia and Colombia has much more to do with globalization policies than human rights or drugs. In the Balkans the U.S., through NATO, appears to seek to protect access to oil supplies in the Caspian sea and continues to play a decisive role in defending a status quo which has greatly benefited this country. In Colombia, the U.S. seeks to protect access to natural resources, especially oil and gold, and to make the area safe for U.S. investments by supporting the narrow economic and political elite which controls power and limits access to the political process. The U.S. continues to use a proxy army --the Colombian army and police -- to advance a neoliberal agenda which includes access to mineral wealth (gold, oil, coal, platinum etc.) in the Middle

Magdalena region, the Choco and other strategic regions of the country. Completion of the Pan-American highway in the northern coastal area together with vast development programs in environmentally sensitive areas, are also means to control Colombia's unique geographic advantage of being the only country in mainland South America with coasts on both the Atlantic and Pacific oceans.

It is significant that U.S. military aid is clearly given to defined geographical areas. These areas are guerrilla territories whereas other areas, such as the one controlled by drug lord and paramilitary leader Carlos Castaño, are left unattended. Why is Milosevic condemned and not Carlos Castaño? Is the U.S. funding a war on drugs or a counter-insurgency war?

In the meantime, the war rages on with nearly 2 million internal refugees, 201 massacres (4+ people) in 1998 alone, "disappearances" and torture. In the last 10 years there has been a total of 37,165 political killings in Colombia as a result of the war to control and exploit the Colombian people and Colombian resources.

Long live globalization!

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OUR VOICES

February 25, 1999

CSN PETITION

1786 signatures collected nationwide

President Clinton, Secretary of State Albright, and Members of Congress -

Whereas Colombia has been termed "the Bosnia of the Western Hemisphere," with more than one million internal refugees and more than 150 politically motivated massacres in 1997; and whereas internationally respected, nonpartisan human rights organizations have assembled evidence linking right-wing paramilitaries to more than 70% of these massacres;

Whereas the main paramilitary leaders, Carlos Castaño, Ramón Isaza, and Aurelio Morantes, remain at large without Colombian authorities making a good-faith effort to apprehend them; whereas Colombian state security forces permit right-wing paramilitary groups to operate openly, conducting political assassinations, massacres, and full-scale military operations with near-total impunity; and whereas human rights organizations have documented systematic ties among Colombian state security forces, right-wing paramilitaries, and drug cartels;

Whereas US military aid to Colombian state security forces implicates us in crimes against humanity; and whereas continued American involvement in Colombia's dirty war jeopardizes our national security, economic self-interest, and moral stature;

We, the undersigned, demand the following:

1. that all US military aid to Colombia be cut off immediately;
2. that restoration of military aid be conditioned on the dismantling of right-wing paramilitary organizations and the capture of known paramilitary leaders Carlos Castaño, Ramón Isaza, and Aurelio Morantes;
3. that the US government support multilateral efforts by the international community and people of conscience within Colombia to negotiate a just and lasting peace in Colombia.

Using the information given in the model letter below, please write to your respective Congresspeople urging them to take a political stand against the misuses of U.S. military aid to Colombia in the name of the, (so called) War on Drugs.

Dear Senator:

I continue to be very concerned about events in Colombia, where the military/paramilitary/guerrilla conflict continues unabated, with numerous massacres (there were 201 in 1998 alone) and thousands of persons displaced from their homes.

I am also concerned about U.S. military aid to Colombia which I understand this year ranks third in the world, behind only that to Israel and Egypt. These funds, supposedly going to fight the War on Drugs, are used instead primarily to support Colombian police and army units which have been involved in human rights abuses themselves (including "social cleansing" of poor people in the cities) in collaboration with illegal paramilitary groups such as those led by Carlos Castaño, the ruthless organizer and commander of the largest paramilitary organization, ACCU, and a known participant in drug trafficking.

Now I learn through information of the Colombia Support Network, that one of Colombia's top generals, Victor Alvarez, commander of an army division in the north of Colombia, called in Colombian army troops to help Castaño in a battle with FARC guerrillas. Thus, our War on Drugs money is going to fortify and protect the drug trafficker, Castaño, instead.

I would like the U.S. government to pressure the Colombian government to capture Castaño, who has an arrest warrant out for him and whose forces have been declared illegal under Colombian law.

I ask that you inquire how it is that we are supporting the Colombian military in its collaboration with Castaño. I ask for your support for an end to U.S. military assistance to Colombia. As a respected human rights leader in Colombia told us last week, U.S. military aid to Colombia is pouring gasoline on the fire of the Colombian conflict.

I wish to thank you very much for your continuous support for peace in Colombia.

CSN -- Madison Projects

SEWING MACHINE PROJECT -- Mary Sanderson

A group of regular humans declaring peace in the jaws of war? This possibility so excited the Madison Branch of the Women's International League for Peace and Justice that they asked for a support assignment. When the sewing co-operative of the Comunidad de Paz de San Jose de Apartado asked for portable electric sewing machines, WILPF members passed along the request through churches and the DeForest Times. More than 20 generous people and the DeForest Rotary Club responded with a small truckload of 19 sewing machines, repair work and cash for shipping! The machines range all the way from solid 1950's work horses to late model fancy stitchers. WILPF and CSN volunteers are working on secure packing for the long trip, and a volunteer will drive the machines to Bridgeport, Connecticut where they'll board a banana boat for Turbo in August.

The all important double edge to this project is the ongoing cultural exchange. Madison WILPF hopes to keep all the donors informed of the successes and troubles experienced by the San Jose Sewing Co-operative and their machines.

It's not too late to be on our donor list. Contributions for shipping will be welcomed by Treasurer D. Grengg, 815 Hiawatha Tr. Madison WI 53711.

FREEZE FOR FOOD -- Peter Joyce

Imagine you just signed up as a Colombia Support Network volunteer. Now what kind of weather are you thinking of? Warm tropical breezes drifting across the jungle? Ha! Not for a group of seven CSN volunteers this year. Try a sheet of hard ice and freezing rain.

That's what the weather was like on Jan 23rd for the 1999 Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCV) 18th Annual Freeze For Food. The RPCV mantra "We will never cancel the run due to weather," went through its annual test. At 10:30 am the race course was covered with a very slick sheet of ice and it was pouring buckets of rain. As chance would have it, the rain slowed down and it warmed up enough so that by the time the 5K race took off at noon the ice had actually melted. All 100+ runners completed their 5 K and 10K races with no reported injuries or accidents. At 2:30 pm when the last 10K runners had finished, it started to snow again. Colombian cosmic karma? Could be. But all seven CSN volunteers, joined by 23 RPCV's, bravely went out into the elements for about 2 hours guiding the runners on their course, not a trivial task. Even Cecilia endured the cold, wet weather, in spite of her lame excuses to go back to the warming house.

This year the race funded refugees in the San Jose de Apartado region who were displaced from the war. We raised over \$2000 in the afternoon and got some good publicity. Amanda Hammatt got several of her Colombian photographs relayed on the local Channel 15 NBC newscast. CBS also covered the event.

Afterwards we got together with a group of RPCV's at a local house and ate some great potluck food and drank hot chocolate. This could be an annual affair if there is enough interest. Contact Jack Laun if you are willing to Freeze For Food. You may be a CSN volunteer, but this is Wisconsin.

EARTHQUAKE RELIEF

Santa Fe de Bogata, March 13, 1999

Dear Friends:

Thank you for your constant concern and help during this emergency that has left uncountable victims.

We have enclosed receipt number 5738 for US \$2000.00, which you so generously donated. This equals COL \$3,102,995.00.

We continue to have an active presence in the zone, and we have a transitional office in Pereira and another in Armenia, with workers who visit the municipalities and are in constant contact with the affected areas.

We have helped meet the immediate needs with food, medicine, toiletries, and tents. At this time, we are working on integrated reconstruction projects.

In the future, we will provide a detailed report about the use of the funds.

Sincerely,
Bishop Hector Fabio Henao Gaviria
Director

Note: CSN followed this with an additional \$1800+ of contributions

NATIONAL CONFERENCE

April 23-25, 1999 Minneapolis, MN

by Rosita Balch and Cecilia Zárate

The National Conference, held April 23-25, was organized by the CSN Minneapolis chapter and aided greatly by the Resource Center of the Americas. On Friday, there was a public presentation on the current situation in Colombia by a panel with Father Javier Giraldo S.J., German Plata from the Proyecto Desarrollo y Paz del Magdalena Medio (PDPMM) in Colombia, Dr. Humberto Marin from the United Nations and Sister Rita Steinhagen as members. Sister Rita was in jail for six months as part of the SOA Watch movement. Nearly 300 people attended the presentations including Matthew Knoester of the CSN Boston chapter and Dennis Grammenos of the CSN Champaign-Urbana chapter.

The following day German Plata gave a detailed presentation of the PDPMM. He explained the complexities of the region where this NGO is working in the middle of several armed groups disputing control over the territory. The conference participants took the Minneapolis sister city of San Pablo as an example and drew up a plan of action to follow when adopting a sister community. They split into three groups to discuss three different aspects of sister cities: political, economic and environmental. Father Giraldo talked specifically about the environment, focusing on the "ecology" of the human beings (the defense of life and the need to protect human lives as part of

ecology).

Father Giraldo reported on the Tribunals of Opinion which focus on crimes against humanity. They were organized by the relatives of the victims to demand accountability from the Colombian government for its responsibility in the massacre of Barrancabermeja. The aspects considered by the Tribunals were: 1) the composition of the government jury, 2) documentation of the atrocities, 3) the government's point of view, 4) the judgment and verdict.

CSN's accompaniment project was then assessed with a report given about Tricia Smith's accompaniment in Uraba and another report from Javier Giraldo about the Cacarica accompaniment. The suggestion was made for the development of a specific budget for future companions along with a draft paper to be drawn up on this subject utilizing the experiences of CSN and other organizations that accompany Colombian people.

On Sunday the group decided that there is a need to have more discussions about the implementation of sister city projects as a main, grass-roots focus of the CSN program. Each chapter should have a representative to handle the phone calls and to help in fund raising, as well as to coordinate with the national office. Each chapter should have a local newsletter and web page in addition to the national newsletter and web page. The CSN Boston chapter's newsletter was used as an example.

The editorial staff of the national office of the Colombia Support Network would like to apologize for the nine months in which editions of the quarterly "Action on Colombia" were not published and distributed to CSN members. The cancelation of the past three issues was due to lack of adequate funds, volunteers and paid staff, and by no means due to a lull in our efforts towards a peaceful and just Colombian state. If you do not already subscribe to the CSN magazine, "Colombia Bulletin", please let us know and we will send you the latest issue free of cost as a token of our sincere apologies. We are more than pleased to distribute the Summer 1999 newsletter and welcome any comments or questions the readers may have concerning the contents of this newsletter or aspects of the Colombian situation.

Peace Prize Awarded to Colombian Activist

by Carolyn Gantner-Kenney

"We gather here tonight to celebrate those who are working for peace," said John Dear, executive director of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, referring to the peace community of San Jose de Apartado, Colombia. "Their commitment to overcoming violence and repression with the healing power of nonviolence is truly inspirational," Dear said before awarding the 1998 Pfeffer Peace Prize to Gildardo Tuberquia, a leader of the peace community.

The awards program was held at the UW Memorial Union while a candlelight vigil celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Those present at the ceremony included state assemblyman-elect, Mark

Pocan, who has made four trips to Apartado since it became a Dane County sister community in 1989. Pocan commented on how School of the Americas graduates are responsible for much of the violence in Colombia. And Dane County Board member Echanton Vedder presented a county-board resolution declaring December 10-17 Colombia Support Week. Vedder also referred to how the \$289 million of U.S. military aid to Colombia has contributed to the ongoing violence in this South American country.

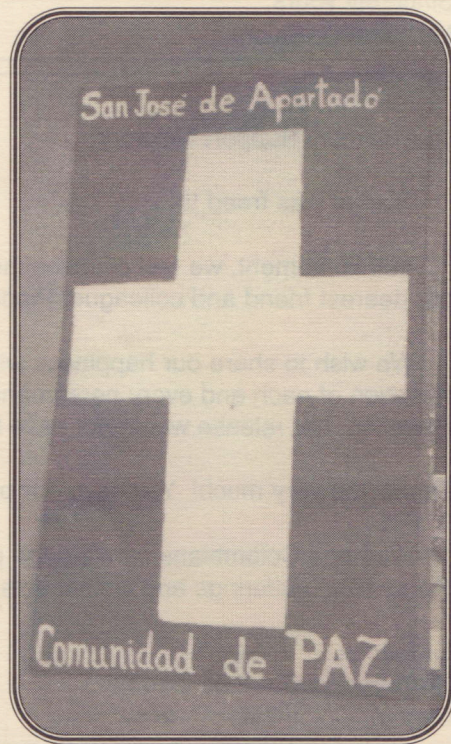
In receiving the award, Gildardo Tuberquia spoke of how the "Comunidad de Paz" was formed in March 1997 to embrace complete neutrality in the armed conflicts between

the guerillas, paramilitary groups, and the Colombian army. The community agreed not to provide arms, logistical support, or information to any armed groups, and to solve all problems without seeking assistance from armed groups. This decision has been costly: 54 members of San Jose de Apartado have been assassinated since its founding. Tuberquia expressed how receiving this award symbolizes "the international support that is so very important for us."

Cecilia Zarate-Laun of the Colombia Support Network, which nominated the peace community for the award, has said that it exemplifies "the tradition of nonviolent social change represented by Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr."



Above: John Dear and Cecilia Zarate-Laun congratulate Gildardo Tuberquia, representative of the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó. The Peace Prize money is being spent to prepare Peace Community members to be self supporting.



Urgent Action

Below is an example of the many urgent actions in which the Colombia Support Network participates. A number of our members receive a copy of the urgent action via e-mail urging them to take action by writing to the designated officials as well as by passing the action on to others. It is through mass communication and action such as this that pressure is placed on the appropriate authorities, and as a result, these authorities are made aware that the international community is watching them and demanding a change in their conduct. Let our office know if you would like to be added to our list.

The Crime

On Friday, May 21 at about 12:45 p.m. PIEDAD CORDOBA DE CASTRO, a Senator from Colombian parliament, was kidnapped in Medellin. She is a committed defender of human rights, of the rights of women, and of the cause for peace in Colombia.

She was leaving a clinic where she had a medical appointment when she was approached by a group of 15 armed men who did not identify themselves. It is not clear if the authors of the kidnapping were paramilitaries or the guerrillas. These circumstances lead us to fear very much for her safety. For that reason we ask you to write letters or send faxes demanding that she be immediately released and also that her physical well-being be respected.

The Action

His Excellency, President Andres Pastrana Arango:

I write to you on a matter of great urgency. I have been informed by the Colombia Support Network of the kidnapping in Medellin of Senator Piedad Cordoba de Castro, a legislator known world-wide for her outstanding work in defense of Women's and Human Rights, and as a peacemaker in Colombia.

While it is unclear who is responsible for this barbarous act, I urge you to use your good offices to secure her immediate release, unharmed, so that she may continue her vital work in the cause of peace and justice. The world is watching your actions in this matter!

Sincerely yours,
Margaret G. Skinner

The Result

To Colombia Support Network:

Piedad was freed !!!

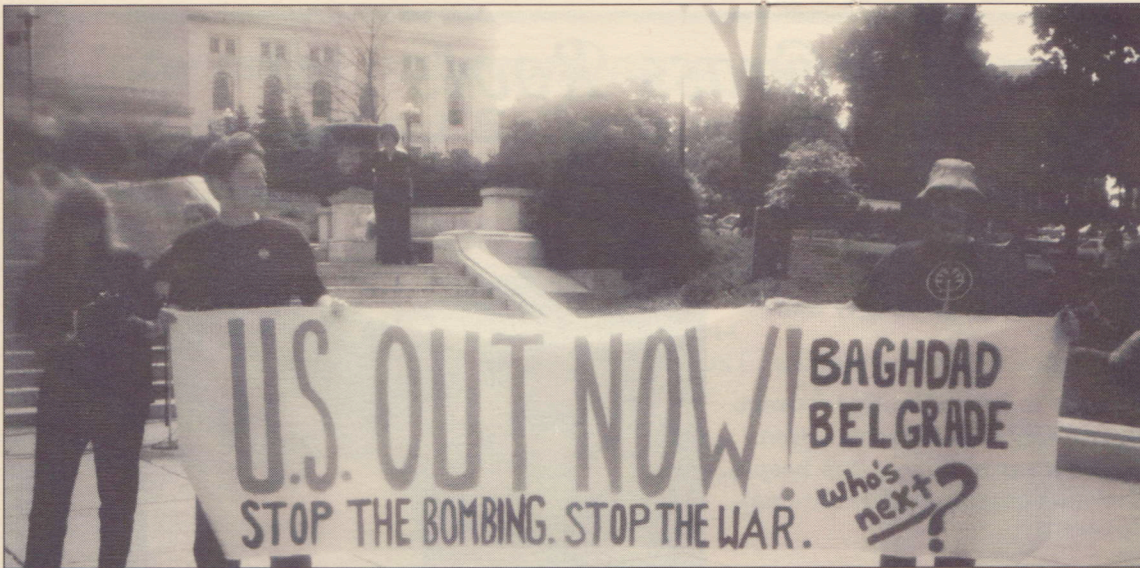
In this moment, we feel overwhelmed by a storm of emotions that do not allow us to express the joy for the freeing of our dearest friend and colleague, Piedad Córdoba. Piedad was freed on Friday June 4th at 11:45 AM.

We wish to share our happiness with each of you and to thank for your solidarity and support. Without the participation of each and every person and organization that rose their voices of protest, and demanded Piedad Córdoba's liberation, her release would not have been possible.

Thank you very much! You have our permanent gratitude.

We hope Colombians can find the path for peaceful coexistence and understanding. Our challenge is to learn to face the multiple sufferings and violent acts that we encounter every day.

Greetings,
Corporación Casa de la Mujer
Bogotá, Colombia



Two activist protest on the Wisconsin Capitol steps on June 5th while by displaying a banner urging the US to cease interference in the Yugoslavian conflict. The Dane County Peace Coalition dedicates itself to promote peaceful resolutions of injustice including the Colombian civil war.

DANE COUNTY PEACE COALITION

by Carol Sundberg

During May and June about forty people from eighteen local peace and justice organizations, including CSN-Madison, came together to discuss our common concerns and to draw up plans to bring more people together around these issues through education. The result was the foundation of the Dane County Peace Coalition (DCPC).

Our first event was a "stop the war" demonstration on June 5th on the steps of the Wisconsin State Capitol building in Madison. About twenty speakers gave one minute talks about their organization's viewpoints and involvement in the war in Yugoslavia, Iraq, and Colombia. I spoke about the peace communities in Colombia, CSN sister cities, and our urgent action work. I also emphasized the presence of oil in the three war-torn Colombian regions as a major motive for U.S. intervention in these areas.

After the greeting sent from U.S. Congresswoman Tammy Baldwin, the 200 demonstrators carried carnations and followed a casket down the capitol steps and across the street to the entrance of the building where U.S. Senator Herb Kohl has his office. To share his support, Senator Kohl sent a staff member to meet us. Each of the demonstrators approached the casket and laid a carnation on it.

Twenty five DCPC members met several times after the demonstration to plan a teach-in on "The Myth of Humanitarian War", held on June 30 at Edgewood College in Madison. The theme was globalization as the underlying motive for U.S. intervention in the Colombian, Yugoslavian, and Iraqi wars. A local expert on each of the regions spoke for twenty minutes after an introduction by Matthew Rothchild, editor of the national news magazine, The Progressive.

Cecilia Zárate-Laun, CSN Program Director, explained that in Colombia internal conflict is not ethnic conflict as in Kosovo, but a class conflict against the poor and outcast groups in society. Even the FARC rebels are exclusionary because they only accept the poor. Cecilia explained that, in Yugoslavia and Iraq, the U.S.'s stated concern is humanitarian. The U.S. looks beyond its borders to "save" the Kosovo refugees and the Iraqi people from their national leaders. In Colombia, Cecilia stated, the rationale is an ethical concern for the American youth who are destroyed by the sale and use of drugs from Colombia.

The conference room that evening was filled to capacity. There were many questions and comments during the forty minute discussion session following the four speakers. The DCPC hopes to take the discussion a step further at the next teach-in by forming small groups to design plans for group action.

From the Grass Roots . . .

The Cacarica people returning to the Chocó, their ancestral homeland near the Panama border, is one of the most vivid examples of the deep desire for peace within the Colombian people. This region along with the Magdalena Medio are the focus for our sister city communities.

The letter below is a testimony to Tricia Smith's courage and an example of how powerfully U.S. citizens' actions can positively impact and give a ray of hope to the people suffering from the effects of this cruel and internationally silent war.

When the CSN national office received the letter from Señor Velasco (representative of the Cacarica people), written in his elementary Spanish, I could not contain my tears. At that moment, I decided to do a literal translation of the letter, including spelling mistakes, so as not to lose any of the feeling the letter beautifully exposes.

There is no better piece of evidence which demonstrates Tricia's determination, strength and generosity than this living document.

Cecilia Zarate-Laun



The photo above shows the young generation of victims resulting from the Colombian war which rages unnoticed by the international community. These children are five of many who were forced out of their rural homes in the Cacarica and made to live the lives of refugees in urban areas.

To the Colombia Support Network:

I write this letter with the objective of giving a sincere thankful to the institution colombia support for your work realized in the person of Triciaesmit. We wish to tell you that the communities we are very grateful and we hope that you keep giving us your accompaniment in the future returns that we are planning in different steps to the basin of the Cacarica river due to the experience of families that were victims of forced displacement and the ones who already returned in the middle of war and that international accompaniment is fundamental in our steps of returning and after because the level of violence in Colombia is at world level (known) that there is no respect for life and respect for the rights of the people the right to live with dignity and all of this is violated by the ilegal actors with complicity with the legal actors that is to say the public forces and there is no punishment for the responsible of these acts there is only respect when there is people accompanying us we want to tell you that triciaesmit leaving has left us with strong pain and a very big vaccuum at the interior of the 24 communities that are planning to return because her work was fundamental for the communities and we hope that you keep accompanying us which could be tricia again she could be accompanied by another person from your organization because tricia knows our process that we are doing in our process of returning because at national level we are acquiring committments from the colombian state because we know they respect the international witnessess so they do not have the community as a community lying when they do not want to do the promised things because there are observers we also know that the gentleman paramilitaries are going to pressure the communities but the only thing they are afraid is the international (community) that is why accompaniment is fundamental (in order) for the families to keep existing so we hope you send accompaniment for all of these reasons.

MEMBERS OF THE DISPLACED COMMUNITIES OF THE CACARICA

Marco Fidel Velasco

**Interested in becoming a more active CSN member?
Contact a CSN representative in your area!!**

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The Colombia Support Network is a national network of groups and individuals working to promote respect for human rights in Colombia and a just relationship between the United States and Colombia through grassroots activism. CSN supports a non-violent resolution to the conflict in Colombia.

CSN-L is brought to you by the
COLOMBIAN LABOR MONITOR
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and by the Champaign-Urbana Colombia
Support Network chapter at
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To subscribe send request to
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PHONE - A - THON

It's that time of year again!

Without the financial support of its members, the Colombia Support Network would not be capable of taking such effective steps toward a peaceful and just Colombian state.

The majority of the money raised through the phone - a - thon, CSN's largest annual fundraiser, is used for operational purposes.

Though the specific dates of the phone - a - thon will not be set until the August 2 board meeting, CSN is anticipating to begin calling its members the last week in August or the first week in September.

Please expect a call from a CSN representative during that week and consider making a donation. If you send your membership donation now, you will save the cost of calling you. An addressed envelope is attached for your convenience. Any amount that you are able to give is extremely appreciated.

COLOMBIA SUPPORT NETWORK
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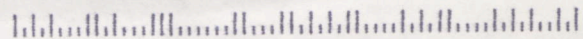
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YOU CAN HELP!!

GET INVOLVED: END THE HORRIBLE HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES IN COLOMBIA

- I would like to become a member of CSN
WICOLA/CSN membership donation \$_____ (\$25 regular, \$15 low income)
- I am sending a donation of \$_____
- Subscribe to the Colombia Bulletin (\$US 25 regular, \$US 12.50 low income)
- Send _____ SOA Watch T-shirts (XL) @ \$12 each
- Send _____ copies of Father Javier Giraldo's Colombia: A Genocidal Democracy @ \$12 each
- Check enclosed MasterCard VISA Account number _____
- Expiration date _____ Signature _____

I am interested in volunteering:

- ___ starting a CSN chapter in my city
- ___ going on a delegation to Colombia
- ___ assisting in fundraising (e.g. phon-a-thon)
- ___ translating / interpreting
- ___ sitting at CSN Farmers Market table
- ___ setting up a talk at my school, group, or church
- ___ participating in CSN working groups

Name (please print) _____
Address _____
City/State/Zip _____
Phone/Fax _____
E-mail _____

**Please make checks payable in \$ US to
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Donations are tax deductible**