

Action on Colombia

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The new Colombia Support Network logo is in the design of a mola. A mola is a piece of textile art, found in Northern Colombia and Panamá. Molos usually represent different aspects of nature, frequently animal life. The CSN mola features a flying dove, the universal symbol of peace, at its center. The diamond patterns in are representations of frogs, which, in some Colombian indigenous mythologies, symbolize rebirth. (See color version on CSN web page!) We hope to engender peace through a rebirth of Colombian civil society. Peace can only come about through non-violent action, by the people of Colombia and supporters around the world. Join us in this struggle.

Special thanks to Sue Kummer of Artifacts who created this design.

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“The Price We Pay to be a World Power”

by Tricia Smith--former accompanier in Uruba

During my visit to Washington in October of 1999, I went to my Ohio Senator, Mike DeWine, to talk to his staff about the Alianza bill, (S1758) which proposes an additional \$1.5 billion for military aid to Colombia. I spoke to his legislative aide who was helping to draft the bill, a bill that will result in an escalation of the conflict and all but crush any possibilities for a negotiated end to the civil war in Colombia. I told him plainly that the money would go towards supporting a military force with a terrible human rights history and with evident links to paramilitary groups.

I reminded Senator DeWine's staff about how our

government supported death squads in El Salvador and helped to overthrow the only democratically elected government in Guatemala in the 1950's. I reminded him of the Nicaraguan Contra scandal, of our active support for General Pinochet's dictatorship in Chile, of our shameful involvement in the Dominican Republic, in Honduras, and many other countries in Latin America. I reminded him of the embarrassing stories that are just now coming to light about our active participation with and support for repressive regimes sowing terror among their own

people. And this man, an aide to Senator DeWine and co-author of the Alianza Act of 1999, shrugged his shoulders and said to me, "That is the price you have to pay to be a world power."

The price we pay to be a world power.

Sadly I cannot simply brush this statement off as a random statement by a Washington bureaucrat. Rather, this very clear statement reflected the conviction I had after visiting nearly a dozen Congressional and Senate offices on Capitol Hill. Between their language of "national interest" and my language of "human rights", we had no common ground to stand on.

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 rapid response e-mail list.

Date: Announced January 11, 2000

Location: Washington D.C., southern Colombia (FARC stronghold)

Event: **President Clinton's \$1.6 billion Aid Package to Colombia**

The Colombia Support Network opposes the Clinton Administration's proposed \$1.6 billion military aid program for Colombia. This planned aid will provide funds to a military which has collaborated with illegal paramilitary forces engaged in killing innocent Colombian citizens and forcing them from their homes.

Pablo Elias Gonzalez, lead investigator for the Chief Prosecutor's Office of Colombia, points to the recent massacre in Ovejas in the department of Bolivar as a clear example of military and paramilitary collaboration. From Wednesday, February 16 until Saturday, February 19, a paramilitary force of 200 men entered the town of Ovejas and massacred at least 30 villagers in a most brutal way. "(The paramilitaries) danced, drank and massacred people, even killing one in the church...They killed others on the basketball court and there was even a table where people were sacrificed. They were tortured and then beheaded," reported Gonzalez. Military officials claim that they were unable to enter the village as paramilitaries were locked in combat with leftist guerrillas. The office of the Chief Prosecutor dismissed the report completely as all victims were civilians.

Just six weeks ago, a clear example of the collaboration occurred in the Middle Magdalena region of Colombia where eyewitnesses reliably reported that the 45th Battalion of the Fifth Brigade of the Colombian Army assisted paramilitary forces in the capture of two peasant leaders, Edgar Quiroga and Gildardo Fuentes, whom the paramilitaries "disappeared" and whose killing has been rumored. Edgar Quiroga has been a notable human rights defender and the Colombian military's apparent involvement in his capture and "disappearance" indicates, as have many other previous actions of military leaders, that the Colombian military has little use for or commitment to protection of human rights.

Assistance provided by the Colombian military to units of the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia paramilitaries in facilitating a massacre at the town of Mapiripan in Meta department is another clear example of this pernicious collaboration.

This United States aid package will simply enhance the Colombian military's capacity for carrying out "dirty work" against Colombia citizens, including human right workers, school teachers, union leaders, journalists, university professors, and any one else who dares to criticize Colombia's facade democracy with its long tradition of impunity for those military officers who commit or facilitate the committing of atrocities.

The fact that hundreds of millions of dollars already spend by the United States government on the Colombian military and police in past years supposedly to fight a "war on drugs" have neither slowed the entry of drugs from Colombia into the United States nor curbed human rights abuses by the Colombian military suggests it is folly to expect this latest \$1.6 billion package to have any other result than more innocent Colombians killed, more military abuses of human rights, and greater paramilitary involvement in massacres and displacement of peasants and townspeople from their lands. And since many of these paramilitaries are reliably reported to be engaged in drug trafficking, we can expect a likely increase in drug trafficking from Colombia to the United States.

The Colombia Support Network calls all people of conscience to contact President Clinton in protest of the proposed military aid to Colombia. We urge you to encourage your Representatives and Senators to oppose the escalation of the war against the people of Colombia.

Military Aid to Colombia Will Make Matters Worse

Let's Back the Peacemakers!

Wilson (Woody) Powell -- Veteran For Peace, Colombia Support Network

I have just returned from the Magdalena Medio area of Colombia, the most violent section of the most violent country in the western hemisphere. I was there with a small group of U.S. citizens, under the auspices of the Wisconsin-based Colombia Support Network (CSN) and the Colombian Non-Governmental Organization (NGO), "Program of Development and Peace in the Magdalena Medio".

We connected with the people of Rio Viejo and the Cimitarra River area who hold off violence through collective action. We talked with the Cacarica refugees, whose genius for organized outreach may finally earn them a place to settle after three long years of internment in an athletic stadium. They were forcibly, quite horribly, removed from their ancestral lands by paramilitaries and the army.

We met and listened to representatives of Colombian NGO's who are literally giving their lives to promote peace and economic opportunity in these dangerous areas.

We asked the high command of the Colombian military and our own ambassador, Curtis Kamman, about Plan Colombia, the \$1.6 billion aid initiative being discussed in Congress. One condition of that aid must be a thorough vetting of Colombia military units to make sure they are free of corruption by drug interests and are not associated with paramilitary actions. The generals desperately wanted us to believe the army was cracking down on the paras as vigorously

as it was chasing the guerillas.

However, the evidence in the field indicates that, even though paramilitaries have been outlawed since 1989, the symbiotic relationship between the military and the paras is still there. A deep pattern of dependency was established in the seventies and eighties, with the complicity and support of the U. S. Government in terms of training and supply. It is at best naïve to think that a simple declaration outlawing paramilitaries (many of whom, by admission of the generals, are ex-military) would have much effect in a country that operates outside the law at so many levels.

Between the National Police and the Army and Navy, the citizens of Colombia should feel well-protected -- but they don't. Uniformed men with assault rifles, transported in armored vehicles, are ubiquitous and stifling. There is a profound gap between the perceptions of the people and the proclamations of the so-called security forces. We were told, more than once, that the citizen who goes to a National Police or Army headquarters for help is likely to be arrested, interrogated, tortured as a suspected guerilla and, possibly, "disappeared".

Our president characterizes military aid to Colombia as a measure against drug trafficking. That's easiest to sell at home. **The real source of violence, however, is social injustice.** When that issue is addressed, the source of coca will start to disappear. Why?

First, we need to understand that drug money exacerbates cor-

ruption. More arms, added to this mix via foreign aid, can only increase violence. The peasants profit little from coca and opium growing. In all cases, coca and opium pay less than the traditional crops they used to grow before they were displaced from their lands by business interests (such as cattle growers, timber and oil companies) using guns for hire.

Therefore, before peace has a chance, there must be reforms to bring people back to their traditional lands -- or, at the very least, provide guaranteed opportunities to pioneer new lands. In addition, coca/opium crop replacement, cooperative marketing, better agriculture, environmental responsibility, and education are all positive endeavors that need our support.

The absolute, most impressive aspect of the Colombian peasants is their ability to organize. Through organization they have, in many cases, been able to establish their neutrality and deflect attacks from armed groups by taking high-profile positions that are hard to ignore. This kind of collective action is the real hope of the country for peace. This is where the true democracy of Colombia resides. We as citizens of the greatest democracy in the world need to support these democratic initiatives.

The claim is made that the guerillas and the drug traffickers must be wiped out first, by military action. The peasant of Colombia does not agree. He has no illusions about the cycles of

cont. on page 7...

Spread the Word!

We'd like to shine some light on the following events

Sewing Machines to a Sister Community

On December 11, 1999, CSN received confirmation from Peace Community leaders in San José de Apartadó, that the shipment of the 19 sewing machines sent from Madison for the women's cooperative at the Peace Community, arrived in perfect condition. The sewing machines were collected by the Madison chapter of WILPF working with CSN. Mary Sanderson, Margaret Stephenson and Dolores Grengg were instrumental in collecting the machines. Ray Steventon from DeForest, donated the service and reparation of the machines. Karen Shevet Dina from WILPF volunteered to drive them to Connecticut, where they were shipped in a UNIBAN freighter. UNIBAN is the marketing company of Uraba's banana plantation owners. They donated the transportation to the port of Turbo, an hour from Apartadó.

Upon arrival, Customs delayed the delivery for bureaucratic reasons. Thanks to the influence of Monsignor Tulio Duque, Bishop of Apartadó, the machines were safely delivered to the delight of the Peace Community.

The women's sewing group in San Jose carries out workshops for a group of 45 people who volunteered to participate in the sewing classes, including 12 men.

This project is an example of the grassroots relationship between a CSN chapter with its sister community. We hope to develop many more ties with struggling Colombian communities and CSN regional chapters.

Madison War Crimes Tribunal

On the 23rd of October, Madison's peace community held a "War Crimes Tribunal" to voice names and hold responsibility for recent U.S. actions on Yugoslavia, Iraq, and Colombia. CSN's President John I. Laun was invited to be the judge in the Tribunal for the three countries.

The event featured nationally known speakers, local activists, and accounts by people from Yugoslavia, Iraq, and Colombia who've suffered from the brutal impact of U.S. foreign policy upon their areas.

In the case of Colombia it was emphasized that Colombia is now the third largest recipient of U.S. military aid behind Israel and Egypt. Death squads target human rights workers, priests, teachers, journalists, labor leaders, and peasants. CSN presented four case examples for the consideration of the assembly:

1. The massacre at Barrancabermeja in May 1998.
2. The assassination of Professor Henao at the University of Antioquia in May 1999.
3. The assassination of Oscar Saíz, a leader of the Middle Magdalena Peasant Exodus in 1998.
4. The Mapiripan massacre of July 1997.

NOTE: The U.S. government was found "guilty" by the assembly.

Colombian Human Rights Leader Reports to U.S. Congress

Congresswoman Tammy Baldwin's office and Rep. Farr from California, at CSN's request, organized a congressional hearing session with Francisco de Roux, (director of the Peace and Development Project in the Middle Magdalena) one of the two areas where CSN develops its sister communities.

PDPMM is a multifaceted program promoting democracy and grassroots activity. De Roux spoke of a program that makes available alternative crops to coca as a viable option allowing them to support their families and have a hopeful future. PDPMM leaves the solutions to the communities themselves to determine their own needs. Usually the people begin by building an economic base. The projects vary from small bakeries to the African Palm Project, where people become actors and not passive observers of their own destiny. As Francisco says, peace is a matter of will, something to be constructed. The program focuses on building peace, a process which takes years to accomplish. Several congressional aides attended the presentation.

CSN Chapter Development Updates

Where in the Hemisphere is Cecilia?

Since the last issue of "Action on Colombia", Cecilia's has been a blur of travel and activity. In working with established and developing chapters, she made three trips to Chicago, two to Minneapolis-St. Paul, two to St. Louis, one to Indiana, one to Ohio, one to Michigan, and one to Philadelphia! In November of 1999, Cecilia attended the Congressional hearing session and consulted with U.S. Representatives that featured the testimony of Francisco de Roux of Colombia (see pg.4).

From D.C. she went directly to the School of the Americas protest in Fort Benning, GA where she and seven other CSN members joined 12,000 concerned citizens. Mark Pohan, a CSN board member, designed and printed stickers, buttons, and a flier to distribute among the attendees asking for their support for peace in Colombia.

In mid-January Cecilia flew to Bogota to prepare two CSN delegations. For the list of the January delegates see pg. 6. That delegation

went to the Magdalena Medio and visited the sister cities of Minneapolis, St. Louis, and Washington D.C, followed by meetings with Colombian NGO's and military officials as well as U.S. Embassy staff. The February delegation traveled to Uruba. See pg. 5 for details of that visit.

Cecilia will return to Madison in the middle of March after weeks of consultation with NGO's and Colombian government officials while gathering material for future articles.

1. Dick Bancroft and Chip Mitchell of the Minnesota Support Group for Colombia, the **Minnesota** CSN chapter, returned from their sister community San Pablo in the Middle Magdalena and are planning presentations. Mitchell logged reports from Colombia for Pacifica Radio's "Democracy Now" program and will also publish articles in local and national magazines. CSN MN staged a rally against the Clinton's aid package for Colombia.
2. The **Washington DC** group is planning their first large organizing meeting for the beginning of March. Joan Drake visited the DC sister community Morelos in the Middle Magdalena on the January CSN delegation. She and Tanya Snyder have been lobbying key people in Washington and attending Congressional hearings.
3. Two members of the **St. Louis** group, Woody Powell and Johnson Lancaster, visited their sister community of Rio Viejo in the Middle Magdalena in January. They are following up community requests for educational and medical supplies. Woody, besides writing a wonderful delegation report, has spoken to radio audiences and community groups and presented a slide show to the office of his Senator. Johnson took first-hand information to Washington, DC, met with NGOs and Congresspeople and published an editorial in the St. Louis Post Dispatch.
4. Daniel De La Pava and his team in **Chicago** continue their work with the Cacarica people. Their return is planned for this summer and a CSN delegation, among others from around the world, will accompany them home. The Communities Returning to the Cacarica ask that faxes be sent to Minister of the Environment Juan Mayr Maldonado (011 57 1 288 9788) requesting he meet with them regarding the illegal deforestation of the Artato Medio tropical rainforest. See the CSN web page for more information.
5. Matthew Knoester and Carrie Vance of **Boston** are raising awareness about the Occidental Petroleum Co. drill site on U'wa land through teach-ins and speaking engagements. They continue to lobby Congresspeople in Massachusetts. Matthew's article "The Colombian Money Pit" was published in Dollars and Sense and "On the Fence: Human Rights or Big Oil for Al Gore" came out in In These Times.
6. Dan Kovalik, one of the newest CSN organizers in **Pittsburgh**, urged the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America on behalf of their 30,000 members to write to President Clinton in opposition to the current emphasis on military aid. He attended the U.S. Representative Criminal Justice Committee hearing and questioned Drug Czar Barry McCaffrey regarding Pastrana's commitment to human rights.
7. Amy Eagles, a friend of CSN from **Boone, North Carolina**, staged teach-ins regarding the aid package. Stan Goff, retired U.S. Army and trainer of Special Forces teams in nations such as El Salvador, Guatemala, Colombia, Haiti, will be featured at a panel discussion in Boone on March 30th.
8. Cynthia Hall and Muriel Nazzari of **Indiana** facilitated a Goshen College teach-in on March 4th regarding the US Foreign Policy towards Colombia.
9. Gary Weglarz and Katie Knight of **Helena, Montana** have been lobbying Congresspeople and raising aware-

ness through local media outlets and meetings while paving the way for CSN Montana.

10. Rolando de Aguiar from **Philadelphia** continues his creative work in maintaining and updating the CSN web page, a vital source for all who seek information on the Colombian situation, active participation options to help bring the violence to an end, and details on the Colombia Support Network. Molly de Aguiar has been a key leader in CSN's fundraising projects.

CSN February delegation to San Jose de Apartado

Mary Sanderson and Cecilia Zárate-Laun arrived in San Jose in early February with \$2500 for the Peace Community which the Returned Peace Corps Volunteers raised in the annual race and fundraiser Freeze for Food. San Jose actively practices neutrality and has been accused by the military of harboring guerrillas even though armed group, including the army, is allowed to maintain a presence there according to Peace Community Regulation.

During their visit, community members expressed fears of an impending massacre at the hands of the paramilitaries. Mary and Cecilia advised General Carlos Enrique Vargas Forero, commander of the XVII Brigade, of the announced massacre and he replied it was the work of guerrillas. General Vargas stated that his army unit was in the area to prevent attacks and that Mary and Cecilia should trust his ability to control the situation.

Mary returned to the United States to learn of the murder of five Peace Community members on February 19. Twenty armed men in army uniforms with paramilitary armbands, entered the town with a list of names. Witnesses report seeing the insignia of the XVII Brigade on the uniforms. The first man was killed after announcing that he recognized soldiers among the gunmen. Another was pulled from the Pentecostal church and shot in the street. Two others were taken from their homes and the last was killed in the town square which features a memorial for the 65 community members who have been disappeared or killed since March of 1997. Mary is lobbying Congress regarding the failure of the local Colombian army unit to prevent the massacre or detain those who committed it.

CSN January Delegation Participants

Cecilia Zarate-Laun (Madison, WI), Woody Powell (St. Louis, MO), Johnson Lancaster (St. Louis, MO), Chip Mitchell (Minneapolis, MN), Dick Bancroft (Minneapolis, MN), Joan Drake (Washington D.C), Bishop Tom Gumbleton (Detroit, MI), Mary Frances Barber (Detroit, MI).

The Colombia Support Network welcomes wide ranges of participation of concerned citizens from all regions of the U.S. We encourage our members and readers of "Action on Colombia" to contact a CSN representative in their area and contribute to the chapter's activities and growth. If no CSN chapter exists in your area and you are interested in becoming involved, please contact the national office in Madison, WI. Every voice is much appreciated!

Treasurer's Report

The final total of the 1999 Phone-a-thon, CSN's annual fundraiser, comes to \$6,123. The total for 1998 was \$5,345. We began phoning members in September who hadn't contributed between January of 1997 and May of 1999. When unable to contact people by phone, a letter with a return envelope was sent. Close to 300 people were contacted this way, and 101 responded. Ninety six people pledged at the \$100-level or below, averaging \$36 per donation. These contributions totaled \$3,473. Five people above the \$100-level, averaging \$530 per contribution towards a total of \$2,650.

Many thanks to those who participated, and thanks in advance to those who will send in membership/donations (tax deductible) in the year 2000!

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

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violence leading to more violence. He knows, better than the pundits, that removing oneself from the cycle through collective action (removing the incentive to grow coca, for instance) leads much more directly to peace.

Meanwhile, the Colombia Support Network is providing an open window through which the world that cares can clearly see and act in support of the peacemakers of Colombia.

If your Congress person knew these facts, do you think they would support more military aid to Colombia, or would they back the peacemakers? Make sure they know!

**The Colombia Support
Network
"Action on Colombia"**

Editors

John Hickman
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Woody Powell
Jose Fernando Moreno
Valerie Van Slyke

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.

Colombia Bulletin Update

As a result of a vote conducted at the January 3, 2000 CSN Board of Directors meeting, the Colombia Bulletin will be independent of the Colombia Support Network. While we would encourage all CSN members and each of the chapters to continue to subscribe to the Colombia Bulletin, we at CSN will not have editorial authority over the magazine, nor be involved as an organization in financing it.

Subscription payment can be made to VVAW (Vietnam Veterans Against War) with "Colombia Bulletin" in the memo and mailed to: Colombia Bulletin, P.O. Box 577875, Chicago, IL 60657. Current subscriptions are still valid and costs are as follows: Individual subscription - \$25; Institutional subscription - \$50; and Low-income subscription - \$12.50.

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- I would like to become a member of CSN
WICOLA/CSN membership donation \$_____ (\$25 regular, \$15 low income)
- I am sending a donation of \$_____
- Send _____ copies of Father Javier Giraldo's Colombia: A Genocidal Democracy @ \$12 each
- _____ CSN t-shirts @ \$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-Madison Farmers Market table
- ___ setting up a talk at my school, group, or church
- ___ participating in CSN working groups

Name (please print) _____

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Phone/Fax _____

E-mail _____

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