



REPLY TO THE  
ATTENTION OF

**DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE  
UNITED STATES SOUTHERN COMMAND  
OFFICE OF THE COMMANDER  
9301 NW 33<sup>RD</sup> STREET  
DORAL, FLORIDA 33172**

July 14, 2014

Commander

Mr. John Laun  
Colombia Support Network  
29 E. Wilson Street #202  
Madison, WI 53703

Dear Mr. Laun:

I am writing in response to your May 30, 2014, letter in which you referenced two issues: the role of U.S. Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM) in the allegations surrounding Andres Fernando Sepulveda Ardila and the role of Colombian military trainers in Latin America.

Although you did not pose a specific question in your letter regarding the Ardila matter, it is improper for me to comment on the details of an ongoing Colombian investigation, other than to note that USSOUTHCOM did not have an AWACS sortie in the region during the timeframe in question.

Your main question centered around my April 29, 2014, testimony regarding the implementation of what has come to be known as the "U.S.-Colombia Action Plan on Regional Security Cooperation." As background, the Plan grew out of a conversation our President had in 2012 with President Santos of Colombia. This initiative, worked out in general terms by the two national leaders, formalizes joint capacity-building activities in the Western Hemisphere and West Africa.

As I conveyed in my testimony, the attractiveness of our President's plan is that the U.S. puts no "boots on the ground;" spends only a fraction of the assistance dollars that would otherwise be required; and facilitates cooperation with an emerging regional power that is stepping up in a responsible and admirable way to assist neighboring countries, many of whom are struggling with the corrosive effects of powerful criminal networks on their national institutions. Human rights are an integral part of all U.S. assistance to Colombia, including the U.S.-Colombia Action Plan. I share the commitment of our President—a Nobel laureate and staunch advocate for human rights—to advancing this cause throughout our hemisphere.

To clarify a statement you made in your letter, at no point have I or any other individual under my command encouraged, nor do we plan to encourage, the Government of Colombia or any other country to train or equip units of foreign security forces that I am prohibited from assisting under U.S. law. Every aspect of our support under this Plan is facilitated through U.S. security assistance and complies with

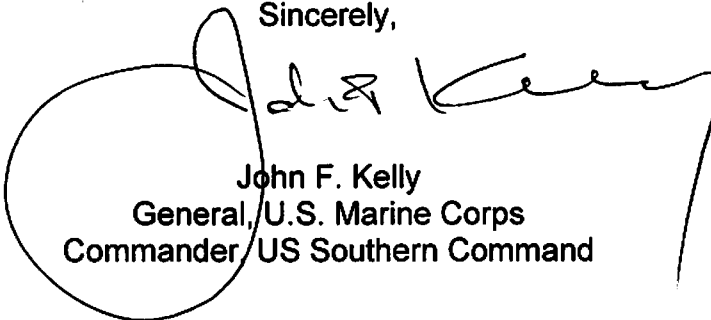
applicable laws, regulations, and policies, including the vetting requirement required by U.S. law.

Human rights is an integral part of USSOUTHCOM's engagement throughout the region, but especially in Colombia, where my dedicated Human Rights Office has made a real and lasting difference. USSOUTHCOM's Human Rights Office has a long history of providing direct support to partner nation militaries and other security forces in strengthening their human rights programs and improving their human rights performance. Additionally, USSOUTHCOM's Human Rights Initiative (HRI), initiated in 1997, brings together representatives of military, security forces, civilian government and civil society to develop a model human rights program for all security forces focused in four areas: doctrine, education and training, internal control systems, and cooperation with civilian authorities

Since 1997, Colombia has been a leading participant in our human rights program, and has made a formal commitment to implement HRI within their armed forces. Moreover, thanks in part to continuous engagement by USSOUTHCOM over the past two decades, the Colombian military is now more professional, accountable, subordinate to civilian authority, and above all committed to respecting human rights. As Colombia evolved into a regional exporter of security expertise, it is now sharing its knowledge—including its experience in institutionalizing respect for human rights within its military—to help develop the capacity of other countries and enhance hemispheric stability and security. The United States supports these efforts as part of our strong bilateral relationship with Colombia, which is founded on shared democratic values, deepening economic ties, and a long history of shared security goals.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to commend your dedication to strengthening human rights. Like your organization, we welcome Colombia's ongoing efforts to ensure accountability and to protect those who are working to bring about a lasting and just peace in Colombia.

Sincerely,



John F. Kelly  
General, U.S. Marine Corps  
Commander, US Southern Command