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February 26, 2016

Hon. Luis Carlos Villegas  
Minister of Defense  
Carrera 54 # 26 – 25 CAN  
Bogotá, Colombia

Ref : Peace Community of San José de Apartadó

Dear Minister Villegas:

Last July we sent you a letter on behalf of the Colombia Support Network, a national nongovernmental organization based in Madison, Wisconsin. In the letter, we set forth specific reasons for our request that Colonel Germán Rojas Díaz be relieved of his command of the 17<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the Colombian Army, and for our further request that the collaboration between paramilitaries and soldiers of the 17<sup>th</sup> Brigade be brought to an end.

We cited incidents in which Col. Rojas had defamed Colombian citizens and had also defamed international groups such as ours. We also cited incidents in which soldiers have repeatedly made false and defamatory accusations against Colombian citizens and of groups such as ours that support these citizens. As you are aware, such defamatory accusations have been taken by paramilitaries as permission to kill.

We have had no indication as to what action you plan to take in response to our request and no indication of the reasons for your decision. Since that time the incidents that we reported to you have been multiplied and therefore, once again, we ask that the Colombian Army cease its open and evident support of



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**Chapters**

Central New York  
(Cortland, Ithaca,  
Syracuse)

Kansas City MO, KS

Dane County, WI

paramilitary activity in Urabá.

On August 5, 2015, Col. Rojas made a public statement, as he has done previously, calling for lifting of the Inter-American Court's injunction requiring the Colombian government to protect the members of the Peace Community. This protective order would never have been necessary if the Colombian Army had done its duty to protect all of the citizens of Urabá. It is indeed ironic that the protective order is necessary because of attacks by Colombian Army soldiers and by the paramilitaries who work together with them.

Then on September 21, 2015, Ernesto Guzmán was murdered by paramilitaries in Playa Larga, a town that, along with other nearby towns, is completely under the control of paramilitaries who regularly threaten to kill the farm families. When the terrified families flee, the paramilitaries seize their land.

In October 2015, the danger to citizens of the Turbo and San José de Apartadó districts increased significantly. Paramilitary operations were so continuous and threatening that a group of members of the Peace Community, with international accompaniment, traveled up to the towns of Arenas Altas and Arenas Bajas to try to encourage and support the families that had been threatened by the paramilitaries, whose presence was evident. If the Colombian Army had been carrying out its duty to protect the citizens, this journey would not have been necessary.

Then, on October 24, in the urban part of Nuevo Antioquia, well-known paramilitaries actually waved a list of names of farmers that they had "sentenced to death". The list included a member of the Peace Community. They flourished the same list on October 27 in the town of La Esperanza. On October 27 and 28, paramilitaries bragged that they were working closely with the Colombian Army to kill "all guerrillas and all their collaborators" which, according to the paramilitaries, means "all of the civilian population in the region", because "they all collaborate with the guerrillas."

When the paramilitaries were asked to leave the private property of Efraín Usuga, who lives in the town of Arenas Bajas, they became so violent that the members of the Peace Community's international accompaniment had to leave, because the rules of their agencies do not allow them to be present during any violent confrontation. Is it not a shame and a disgrace to the Colombian Army, sworn to protect Colombia's citizens, that internationals have to accompany those citizens to ensure their safety?

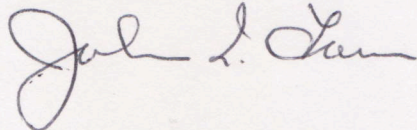
In the beginning of November 2015, families from the area fled to La Esperanza, taking shelter in the school and the health center and building little huts out of boxes and junk, to hide from the paramilitaries threatening to kill them. And on November 7, a resident of the urban part of San José de Apartadó, Albeiro Tuberquia, was murdered in the plain sight of Colombian soldiers and police. Meanwhile Colonel Rójas went on the radio once again, insisting that there were no paramilitaries, and if there were any, they were "under control" and "present no threat to anyone". Exceptions, of course, would be Ernesto Guzmán and Albeiro Tuberquia, who were murdered by paramilitaries within a few weeks of those statements. Has there been any investigation of these murders?

And when a government delegation that did have concern for the safety of the people went on a humanitarian mission to Playa Larga to see what was going on, the delegation saw the paramilitaries in action. When members of the Peace Community traveled during November to La Hoz, to Rodoxalí, to La Cristalina, and to La Unión, they regularly saw armed paramilitaries walking around as if they owned the places.

As recently as January 24, 2016, Colombian Army soldiers, accompanied by unidentified individuals, tried to barge into a private home without a warrant that would make their entrance legal. The resident, a campesino named Pedro Pablo Rivera Usuga, was aided by his neighbors and now he and Ramon Guerra are missing.

These are the reports of people who live in Urabá, who work there every day, and who have seen and heard what paramilitaries and Colombian Army soldiers are saying and doing. Yet your representative, Col. Germán Rojas, hears nothing and sees nothing. When will the Colombian government take responsibility for the safety of the citizens of Urabá?

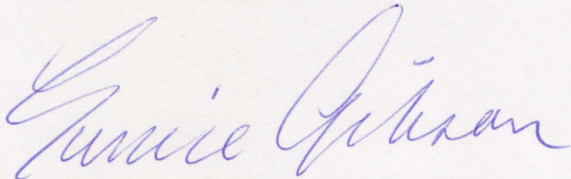
Respectfully,



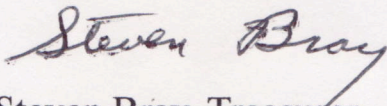
John I. Laun, President



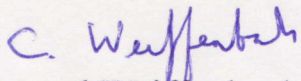
Dolores Grengg, Vice- President



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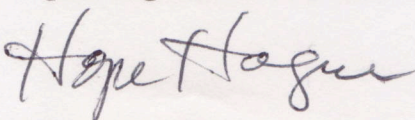


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*Craig Wehrle*

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