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Member, U.S. Congress

Organizations listed for
identification purposes only

January 29, 2016

Members of the Congressional Progressive Caucus
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C.

Dear Members of the Congressional Progressive Caucus:

I write to you on behalf of the Colombia Support Network, a human rights organization based in Madison, Wisconsin with chapters in other U. S. cities and sister communities in various parts of Colombia. As you may know, the Colombian government and the FARC guerrillas are engaged in a series of discussions and working sessions devoted to the development of a peace agreement which would bring to an end a conflict which has lasted more than 50 years. We very much support this initiative, which seems to be nearing the finalizing of an agreement under the terms of which the FARC guerrillas would cease their armed conflict and be reinserted into civil society.

Colombia's President, Juan Manuel Santos, has requested that the United States Government provide aid and assistance for the implementation of the peace agreement. He has scheduled a meeting with President Barack Obama in Washington on February 4, 2016, seeking funding for the operation of the institutions assigned roles in the transitional justice process. We are very supportive of aid provided for this purpose, as we believe the peace process underway in Colombia holds great promise for an end to armed conflict and greater wellbeing for Colombians.

However, we are concerned that there are structures that have not been dealt with adequately by the Colombian government and which hold the possibility of undermining the efforts for peace. These structures are paramilitary forces which have in many cases wreaked havoc on peaceful residents of rural areas. The Santos government has suggested that the remaining paramilitary forces are simply "criminal bands" (bandas criminales) or reemerging armed groups which had been returned to civilian life through a paramilitary demobilization plan carried out during the Presidential Administration of Alvaro Uribe Velez, Juan Manuel Santos's predecessor. In fact, however, many of the paramilitary forces simply did not disband and have continued to present a great threat to rural communities in several regions of Colombia. This has been particularly true with respect to the Peace Community of San Jose de Apartado, which is the sister community of Dane County, Wisconsin. In the case of the Peace Community, paramilitary forces



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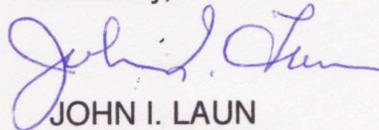
Dane County, WI

have continually patrolled with soldiers from the Seventeenth Brigade of the Colombian Army, making threats to eliminate the Peace Community and killing some of Community members.

We ask that your Caucus convey to President Obama the urgency of eliminating these illegal paramilitary forces. President Obama appears to be prepared to approve funds for the peace arrangements in Colombia as a part of U.S. assistance through "Plan Colombia". We ask that you convey to the President the need to have the dismantling of the paramilitaries be a condition of providing further aid to Colombia for the peace process, and suggest that this aid not be called "Plan Colombia", which has a very negative connotation throughout this hemisphere.

Thank you for your kind attention to this letter.

Sincerely,



JOHN I. LAUN
President, CSN

JIL:llm