

August 8, 2012

President Juan Manuel Santos Calderon
Casa de Nariño
Carrera 8 # 7 - 26
Bogotá, Colombia
Dear President Santos,

I am writing to you out of a general concern, shared with many others, over plans for large-scale mining operations, which, it appears, pose a serious threat to the delicate ecosystem of the Colombian Massif. But I am writing also for personal reasons, which I hope it is appropriate to bring to your attention.

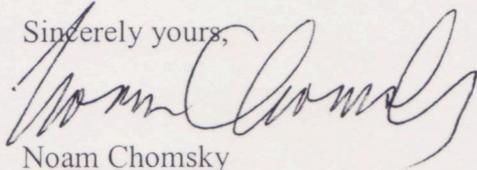
I have visited Colombia a number of times, sometimes for lectures at universities and to communities (and an honorary degree at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia). Most of the visits, however, were along with international human rights groups and human rights activists. My first visit was on an Amnesty International mission, opening a global campaign for protection of human rights defenders. On this and later occasions the visits were primarily for inquiries, together with human rights defenders, into abuses suffered by campesinos, Afro-Colombians, and indigenous communities, mostly in La Vega in Cauca Department, but elsewhere as well.

A few years ago, my wife died. Shortly afterwards, villagers in Santa Rita in La Vega decided to dedicate a forest to her memory on the mountain above their village. I went to the ceremony with friends, and with the gracious and invaluable assistance of the Defensoría. It was one of the most moving experiences of my life to participate in the dedication of "The Carol Chomsky Forest." This was part of a well-designed program, carefully explained by several of the Santa Rita planners in a public meeting, to develop the water resources, and to protect these and the rich environment generally, all sure to be severely harmed if not destroyed by mining operations.

I need not elaborate on the significance of preserving these invaluable resources, not only for the local communities but also far beyond. While my own appeal to you is primarily personal, the kind and compassionate initiatives of the villagers of Santa Rita should be a highly meaningful stimulus for international participation in the crucially necessary efforts to protect the Amazonian territories and the surrounding regions, which are unparalleled in their extraordinary biodiversity and their import for the global environment.

I hope it will be possible to take steps to assure that these local efforts will be successful, and to safeguard these incomparable treasures for Colombia and for the world.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Noam Chomsky". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over the printed name below it.

Noam Chomsky