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The Honorable Condoleezza Rice
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
Washington, DC 20520
Fax: 202-647-2283

Dear Secretary Rice:

We are deeply troubled that the State Department has certified that Colombia meets human rights conditions for receiving military aid. Such certification is directly contrary to the frequent news that we receive each week of ongoing human rights abuses in Colombia, many of which involve security forces engaged in the intimidation, harassment, or outright murder of civilians. Other cases demonstrate clear evidence of Colombian army cooperation with illegal paramilitary groups who do the same. Paramilitary groups in Colombia are on the official U.S. list of terrorist organizations.

We believe that the State Department's decision to certify Colombia will send the message to the Colombian government that the U.S. will continue to send military aid regardless of the Colombian military's compliance with human rights standards.

This decision will increase the likelihood of new attacks on union leaders, more of whom are murdered in Colombia than in any other country in the world. State Department certification is grim news for Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities, who are being forcibly displaced from their land and murdered by the military at an alarming rate. Journalists will be at higher risk as they seek to accurately report on the armed conflict. Human rights defenders who have been publicly but falsely identified as FARC collaborators will again become assassination targets for the military. Certification will likely mean that the Uribe government will fail to follow through on the few human rights abuse cases that have made it into the courts. In this way, certification undermines the rule of law.

Because of the amount of military aid the U.S. sends to Colombia, our country could have great deal of political leverage with the Colombian government to hold them accountable for the actions of its military and to prosecute human rights abusers. The State Department, with this certification, has failed to significantly utilize that leverage. We ask that the next time Colombia comes up for certification, you will first consult with human rights organizations, and implement their recommendations for action before certification is finalized.

Sincerely,



Gary L. Cozette
Director