



**A LETTER to CONGRESS
From U.S. TRADE UNIONS
OPPOSING MORE U.S. AID to the COLOMBIAN
MILITARY**

June 3, 2005

Dear Member of Congress:

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Executive Vice President

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Executive Vice President

We write to you today as U.S. trade union concerned about violence against Colombian trade unionists in light of the approaching congressional consideration of the FY 2006 foreign aid appropriations bill.

Colombia continues to be the most dangerous countries in the world for trade unionists. More trade unionists are killed in Colombia than the rest of the world combined. In 2004 alone, 94 trade unionists were assassinated bringing the total to over 2,100 Colombian trade unionists murdered since 1991. The Escuela Nacional Sindical (ENS), the National Labor School in Colombia, a well-respected NGO, has found that paramilitary groups are responsible for the majority of violations against Colombian trade unionists, including 70% of homicides in cases where the assailants were known. According to the 2004 State Department Report on Colombia, collaboration between paramilitary groups and the Colombian military continues.

ENS has also reported that Colombian state entities are directly responsible for 40% of violations with known assailants in 2004 and have increased their attack on labor unions by 204% between 2002 and 2004. U.S. policy towards Colombia fails to address the ongoing violence against Colombian trade unionists and instead supports a military that continues to attack trade unionists and collaborate with paramilitary terrorists. The U.S. should not continue to support the Colombian military while they attack trade unionists.

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The Colombian government has also continually failed to investigate and charge those responsible for the murders of Colombian trade unionists. According to the Human Rights Observatory of the Office of the Vice President of Colombia, of the 1,981 murders of trade unionists from 1992 to 2004, only 0.01% of these murders ever resulted in jail time for those responsible. As international union concerned about the impact of U.S. policy on workers here and abroad, we believe that the U.S. should sharply cut back its massive aid to the Colombian military while impunity reigns in Colombia.

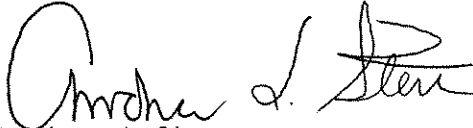
When Plan Colombia was originally debated in 2000, many members of Congress were concerned that this policy would draw the U.S. deeper into Colombia's civil conflict. Now, at the end of Plan Colombia, the current Administration has asked for another \$731 million for Colombia in FY 2006, a funding level on par with past years despite the end of Plan Colombia. Since the initiation of Plan Colombia more than \$3.2 billion of taxpayer money has been sent to Colombia, 80% of which has gone to the Colombian military and police.

Colombian workers, along with much of civil society, oppose the continuing militarization of U.S. aid to Colombia. They instead advocate for a more balanced foreign aid program that would direct more aid towards social and economic programs and the strengthening of the rule of law. Aid is needed to support the effective protection of Colombian trade unionists and prosecution of those responsible for the assassinations of trade unionists as well as sustainable development and viable alternatives to drug production and trafficking.

Our union represents 1.8 million tax-paying workers who are concerned that U.S. policies are promoting a race to the bottom in terms of wages, working conditions, and respect for basic rights. How can we tell them that the U.S. is continuing to support a foreign military that both supports and commits violence against workers in Colombia?

We urge Congress to support any measures that examine these policies, and levels US aide to the Colombian military. We support any congressional initiative that ends additional military escalation of the conflict in Colombia.

Sincerely,



Andrew L. Stern
SEIU International President