

August 28, 2023

Members of the House and Senate conference committee  
of the FY24 State, Foreign Operations Appropriations bill  
United States Congress

Dear Members of Congress,

As humanitarian, faith, human rights, labor, environmental, Afro-descendant, Colombian-American, and other U.S. civil society organizations long supporting peaceful solutions to the decades of violent conflict in Colombia, we urge you to support the Senate provisions of the FY24 State, Foreign Operations Appropriations bill that provide aid to support the consolidation of peace, the improvement of human rights, and the well-being of those who have suffered the cruel impact of war in that country.

The Petro Administration has expressed a commitment to consolidate the 2016 peace accords and expand peace; has indicated through its policies, personnel, and collaboration with international human rights organizations its commitment to respect for human rights and the rule of law; has continued Colombia's generous tradition of offering refuge to several million Venezuelan migrants and refugees; is committed to protecting the rights of Afro-Colombian and Indigenous peoples, women and members of the LGBTQ+ community; and is a leader and partner in efforts to address deforestation of the Amazon region and climate change. The United States should take this opportunity to continue and deepen cooperation on the consolidation of peace; improving respect for human rights and protection of human rights defenders, including land and environmental activists; improve protections for rural communities, including Afro-Colombian and Indigenous peoples and small farmers; implementing the Ethnic Chapter of the 2016 peace accords and addressing gender-based and racial discrimination; collaborating with Colombian efforts to welcome Venezuelan migrants and refugees; and tackling the ever more pressing challenges of climate change. Cutting funding for Colombia in these areas runs directly counter to long-standing bipartisan U.S. goals in the country and the region.

The United States should also continue collaboration with Colombia on more sustainable and effective drug control policies. In particular, taking advantage of the drop in coca prices, the United States and Colombia should redouble efforts to help low-income Colombian farmers switch to licit crops; expand efforts to formalize land titles, which gives farmers incentives to commit permanently to licit crops; and back Colombian efforts to interdict traffickers, target money launderers, and investigate and prosecute corrupt ties between political leaders and members of the security forces with drug traffickers and illegal armed groups.

Among the programs we believe the U.S. Congress should strongly support, included in the Senate markup of the FY24 bill, are: \$15 million for USAID's human rights program, which supports respect for human rights, protection of human rights defenders, and peace accord implementation; \$25 million for Afro-Colombian and Indigenous communities and organizations; programs to reintegrate combatants into civilian life; demining activities; programs to help formalize land titling and return land to internally displaced persons; programs to help small farmers switch to licit crops; support for the tripartite transitional justice system set up after the 2016 peace accords, including for the Unit to Search for the Disappeared and for the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, as well as for follow-up activities to share lessons learned and implement recommendations from the Truth Commission; programs to support labor rights; and programs to assist and integrate Venezuelan and other migrants and refugees while at the same time aiding receiving communities. We strongly urge providing \$5 million for the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights office in Colombia, above the \$3 million

included in the Senate report, for its invaluable efforts to provide monitoring and technical advice to improve human rights, protect human rights defenders, consolidate peace, and monitor the humanitarian situation in still-conflicted areas of the countryside. In addition, we support continuation of the human rights conditions on military and police aid included in the Senate. These conditions are necessary to encourage improvements in respect for human rights by the Colombian security forces and have been in legislation in some form since FY2000.

We also urge the conferees not to retain section 7045 (e) that could potentially bar Title III assistance to many countries in Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa, and other parts of the world.

Thank you for your support for the consolidation of peace and the rule of law in Colombia.

AfricanDefenders (Pan African Human Rights Defenders Network)

Afro-Colombian Global Initiative

Amazon Watch

American Federation of Teachers

Colombia Acuerdo de Paz NGO

Colombia Human Rights Committee

Colombia Human Rights Network

Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces

Darryl Chappell Foundation

Disciples Center for Public Witness (Disciples of Christ)

FOR Peace Presence

Franciscan Action Network

Global Black

Global Ministries, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ

Healing Bridges

Human Pictures

Immigrant Assistance Services Foundation

International Institute for Race & Equality

InterReligious Task Force on Central America and Colombia

Latin America Working Group (LAWG)

Loretto Community Latin America/Caribbean Committee

Mano River Union Civil Society Natural Resources Rights and Governance Platform

Mennonite Central Committee U.S.

Missionary Oblates/OIP Trust

National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd

National Council of Churches

Oxfam America

Pax Christi USA

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Presbyterian Peace Fellowship

Program for the Heritage of Ogiek and Mother Earth (PROHOME)

United Church of Christ, Justice and Local Church Ministries

Washington Brazil Office

Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA)  
Witness for Peace Solidarity Collective