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PRESS RELEASE

U.S. Government Certifies Colombia Despite Lack of Human Rights Results

More than 3,000 civilian deaths imputed to security forces; only token prosecutions advance

The State Department announced on September 15th that they certified that Colombia was meeting the human rights conditions required for receipt of military aid in the face of abundant evidence that human rights violations by security forces remain unpunished. Its own press release acknowledged the serious human rights problems in Colombia. U.S. and Colombian human rights groups provided extensive evidence to the State Department that in the past year, progress has stalled on investigating and prosecuting human rights violations, particularly the cases involving more than 3,000 civilians allegedly killed by Colombia's armed forces. Justice is not advancing even in the most notorious and well-documented cases, such as the 2005 San José de Apartadó massacre and the 2007-08 killings of over 20 young men in Soacha. The transfer of cases of suspected homicides by the armed forces from military to civilian courts has slowed. Of the thirty high-level military officials dismissed from their posts in reaction to the scandal over the killing of civilians, not a single one has yet been charged for those crimes.

The Colombian government has dramatically failed to meet its obligations to protect human rights defenders. During this certification period, threats against human rights defenders, Afro-Colombian and community groups increased exponentially, while no investigation into these threats has yielded results. The Attorney General is investigating the widespread illegal surveillance by Colombia's intelligence agency, the Department of Administrative Security (DAS), against members of Colombia's Supreme Court, journalists, political opponents and human rights defenders. But these investigations have not concluded, and Colombia's legislature failed to enact legislation to disband and replace the DAS.

While underscoring reductions in new cases of killings of civilians by the armed forces, the State Department acknowledges in its certification press release that serious human rights problems continue in Colombia. "There are concerns that human rights cases are not being transferred from the military to civilian judicial system as often as they should. Alleged illegal wiretapping and surveillance by Colombia's Department of Administrative Security (DAS) are unacceptable. It is vital that the Prosecutor General's Office conduct a rigorous, thorough, and independent investigation to determine the extent of these abuses and hold all perpetrators accountable. Threats by criminal groups against human rights defenders (HRDs) and civil society in Colombia are also deeply troubling."

The State Department also noted that it "will continue to engage with Colombian and international human rights groups, as well as civil society. We appreciate the commitment of these groups and applaud their often dangerous work."



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By certifying that human rights conditions are met despite abundant evidence to the contrary, the U.S. government has once again prioritized the delivery of its complete package of military assistance over progress on human rights. The U.S. Congress should use its authority to freeze the assistance attached to the conditions until greater human rights progress is achieved.

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