

March 30, 2017

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson
The U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary of State Tillerson,

We write to urge your support for Colombia's effort to bring a permanent end to its half century of conflict. The U.S. government can play an essential role to guarantee this outcome—which is in the United States' interest—by offering strong diplomatic support and funding for implementing the peace accords achieved with the FARC guerrillas as well as supporting the recently launched negotiations with the ELN.

This historic opportunity to end the Western Hemisphere's longest-running conflict must not be lost. Over 260,000 people have been killed and seven million people have been internally displaced. Civilians—especially members of Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities, poor farmers, women, trade unionists and human rights defenders— have suffered the brunt of this brutal war. They have suffered violence by all armed actors, including the paramilitary forces, the FARC and ELN guerrillas, and the Colombian armed forces.

After the signing of a final peace accord between the Colombian government and the FARC guerrillas in November 2016, which was approved by the Colombian Congress, peace implementation is beginning to advance. Nearly 7,000 FARC guerrillas have moved into concentration zones. On March 1, they began the process of laying down arms, scheduled to conclude on May 29, and they will begin to be reincorporated into civilian life. In February, negotiations formally launched with the last remaining guerrilla group, the ELN.

We urge the State Department to provide full backing to the peace accords agreed over years of negotiations between the Colombian government and the FARC. We also urge that the State Department include in its budget the full amount pledged by the previous U.S. administration for peace accord implementation, as well as humanitarian assistance for those displaced by continued violence. The transition to peace involves expanding the role of civilian government in former conflict zones, so that must be the focus—not military aid. Assistance should include USAID support for reparations and land restitution for victims; protection for demobilized guerrillas and for human rights defenders at risk; community development programs created in consultation with Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities; labor rights programs that promote equitable prosperity, a key condition of sustained peace; efforts to improve governance and voluntary eradication in coca-growing communities; and USAID's robust and well-directed human rights program. Support for reintegration of ex-combatants, including access to decent employment, is

essential. The United States should continue to support demining activities. In addition, it is imperative to provide substantial funding for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights' office in Colombia to strengthen protection of human rights in a challenging moment, and for the UN Political Mission to verify the peace accords.

U.S. support for counternarcotics efforts in Colombia should help to implement the drug policy chapter of the peace accords. To do this, they should help Colombian farmers shift permanently away from coca and poppy production, working with farming communities to ensure this happens in a sustainable way, addressing factors that drive farmers to coca cultivation in the first place. Aerial herbicide spraying brings only temporary reductions, undercuts the spirit of the accords and risks losing the opportunity to engage with communities to permanently develop licit economies.

We also urge the State Department to provide diplomatic support to the developing negotiations with the ELN guerrillas, which have advanced despite considerable obstacles. This process is necessary in order to secure a robust peace in the country.

Finally, we ask the State Department to urge the Colombian government to take more effective action to dismantle the paramilitary successor groups, a lethal manifestation of transnational organized crime that continues to threaten and kill members of rural communities, especially human rights defenders and local community leaders. The Colombian government must do more to protect these defenders and to investigate and prosecute threats and attacks against them. Eighty human rights defenders were killed in Colombia in 2016, and in the first two months of 2017 alone, another twenty-two defenders have been killed. For peace to be just and lasting, this carnage must end now.

In four years, the talks between the Colombian government and the FARC achieved an outcome that avoided thousands of lives being lost in countless more years on the battlefield. The United States faces a historic opportunity to help end this conflict and to enhance stability in the region. We urge the State Department to seize this opportunity and help Colombia advance to a just and lasting peace.

Sincerely,

Latin America Working Group
Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office
United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries
Global Ministries of the United Church of Christ and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Washington Office on Latin America
National Council of Churches
Presbyterian Church USA

Lutheran World Relief
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Episcopal Church
Mercy Corps
Colombia Human Rights Committee
Oxfam America
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
Franciscan Action Network
AFL-CIO
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Solidarity Center
International Labor Rights Forum
Church World Service
Institute on Race, Equality and Human Rights
Peace Brigades International USA
Amazon Watch
Center on Conscience & War
SHARE Foundation
Presbyterian Peace Fellowship
Norwegian Refugee Council USA
Sister Parish, Inc.
Chicago Religious Leadership Network on Latin America
Just Foreign Policy
Center for International Environmental Law
Pax Christi International
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society

cc: Ambassador Kevin Whitaker