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## Stop the Militarization of Colombia

While the world's attention has turned toward the Middle East and the "War on Terror," the situation in Colombia has steadily deteriorated. Though Colombia has recently received much less attention from the U.S. media and the Bush Administration, U.S. policy has continued unabated. Currently, that policy is marked by a disturbing trend: Colombia is becoming a lower priority, but the size and purpose of the U.S. military aid are expanding.

U.S. commitments in Colombia have steadily increased to include not only counter-narcotics programs but also counter-insurgency operations and the guarding of strategic physical infrastructure. The U.S. government has provided \$99 million to protect the Cano-Limon oil pipeline in Northern Colombia, and the Bush Administration has requested up to \$147 million in fiscal year 2004 to provide training and weapons to continue the program. It is of concern that the U.S. has given precedence to protecting an oil pipeline rather than defending civilians from attacks by armed groups. American tax dollars are now being used to support a military with documented human rights abuses so that they can protect the resources of a private company.

Seventy members of the U.S. Army's Special Forces are now in the state of Arauca to train Colombian troops to protect the pipeline. They are expected to train close to 7,000 troops, most of them from the 18<sup>th</sup> brigade. U.S. law prohibits foreign military units who have credible evidence of human rights violations against them from receiving aid. However, the 46<sup>th</sup> battalion of the 18<sup>th</sup> brigade has been linked to the killing of 145 civilians in the state of Norte de Santander. While the U.S. claims that the 46<sup>th</sup> battalion is not part of the organic structure of the 18<sup>th</sup> brigade, General Carlos Lemus, commander of the 18<sup>th</sup> brigade, considers the 46<sup>th</sup> battalion part of the 18<sup>th</sup> brigade and has commanded the 46<sup>th</sup> for two years.

July 13<sup>th</sup> marked the three-year anniversary of the passage of "Plan Colombia," the first major aid package to Colombia. Since 2000, the U.S. Senate has signed the check for more than \$2.5 billion dollars in aid to Colombia; 85 percent of which has been military aid, and only seven percent for alternative development programs. The Colombian military, which receives the vast majority of this aid, has been shown to have documented ties to brutal paramilitary groups responsible for more than 70 percent of the human rights violations against Colombian civilians last year. The Senate has debated this policy only once – in 2000.

The Senate will begin looking at the 2004 Colombia aid package—almost \$700 million dollars in mostly military aid—in late July or in September. They plan on passing it with no public debate. **Please call or write your Senators expressing your concern about**

**the impact of military aid. Ask them to debate and change the policy when the foreign aid bill comes to the floor in September.**

Clearly, drug treatment and prevention programs are needed at home to slow the demand for drugs. In a study commissioned by the U.S. Army, the RAND Corporation found that treatment and prevention programs were 23 times more cost-effective at cutting drug abuse than eradication in source countries like Colombia. Many hard-core addicts seeking treatment in the U.S. cannot get it, and after-school programs are facing budget cuts. Please help end drug abuse and related violence by investing in people at home. Other recommendations to Congress include:

- End fumigation, and help Colombian farmers find a legal way to support their families, by increasing funding for alternative development programs.
- Continue aid to strengthen civilian democratic institutions such as the Colombian justice system.
- Continue to aid programs that protect human rights defenders, union leaders, and local government officials. These protection programs do not solve the problem of attacks on civilians in Colombia, but they do help keep people alive, and are thus incredibly important.
- Cut military aid, sending a message that we will not tolerate support for violence by any side, and work with the United Nations to encourage peace talks instead.

*By Catherine Gordon*