

Cut Military Aid to Colombia

June 16, 2005: The five-year policy that has poured billions of U.S. dollars into drug crop fumigation and military aid is expiring this year, and Congress will soon vote on whether or not to continue military aid in 2006. This is our chance to influence the course of Colombia policy. We need to show Congress that it's time to cut military aid to Colombia.

The foreign operations budget this year is under pressure due to the enormous expenditures of the Iraq war, and we have a better chance than usual this year at cutting military aid. Support for cutting military aid will show the Administration and Congress that the public does not support ineffective, inhumane drug spraying or support for a military whose human rights record has worsened since U.S. aid began in 2000.

The vote is expected in the House of Representatives the week of June 27 as the foreign operations appropriations bill reaches the floor. Rep. Jim McGovern (D-MA) will offer an amendment to the bill that will cut military aid to Colombia. Only a handful of world affairs are debated when the foreign operations bill comes up each year, and it is significant that Colombia is one of them. Through continuous opposition to Plan Colombia, we have achieved our goal of making Colombia policy a controversial issue in Congress!

Talking points for phone call.

* I believe that peace and stability in Colombia are possible, and that the U.S. should play a role, but they will not come through more military aid and fumigation.

* Plan Colombia was passed by Congress in 2000 as a five-year policy with the goals of reducing drug availability on U.S. streets and reducing violence in Colombia. It has failed miserably. Why should the U.S. continue this policy?

* 2004 saw the largest aerial spray campaign ever in Colombia. Despite the record effort, the amount of coca produced in Colombia last year did not budge an inch-- it actually went up slightly! After five years and billions of dollars, the number of hectares planted in coca in Colombia and the price and availability of cocaine on our streets remains almost the same. Fumigation has wreaked havoc on rural Colombian communities, destroying farm families' food crops, usually without providing alternatives. The policy has made NO progress. We need a new approach.

* I'm extremely concerned about violence against innocent civilians in Colombia by all armed actors. The United Nations has found that direct human rights violations by the Colombian military have increased in recent years; I don't believe that the United States should give more money to a military with a poor human rights record. Colombia is no closer to peace with brutal armed groups like the FARC than it was when Plan Colombia began.

* WE WANT a policy that supports the justice sector by protects human rights defenders, peace workers, and labor leaders; that values the perspectives of religious, peace, and indigenous communities; and that helps rural communities develop sustainable livelihoods free from violence.

* WE WANT a policy that combines social assistance in Colombia with drug treatment and prevention programs at home, not more failed attempts at drug crop fumigation.

* In February, 8 civilians, including three children, were massacred in two incidents in the peace community of San José de Apartadó. The community holds the Colombian military responsible. A serious investigation is needed.

* WE WANT our government to take a stronger stance on human rights. I ask that you instruct the State Department not to certify that Colombia has met the human rights conditions necessary to receive U.S. aid. A full and transparent investigation should be conducted to ensure that the perpetrators of the San José massacre, and other massacres, are brought to justice, and the Colombian military must break its links with abusive paramilitary forces.

A proposal for a new U.S.-Colombia policy, "Blueprint for a New Colombia Policy," is available at the website of the Latin America Working Group, <http://www.lawg.org/docs/Blueprint.pdf>. Over 30 human rights, church, union and grassroots groups contributed to the Blueprint. It's our way of saying to Congress, "there is an alternative!"

-Catherine Gordon

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Dear Representative _____

I would like you to support a new policy toward Colombia, and I urge you to vote YES on any amendments that cut military aid to Colombia, or that cut military aid and transfer it to social aid. Plan Colombia is supposed to end this year, and given its failures, I believe it should be replaced by a policy that works. Drug crop fumigation in Colombia has not helped lessen the price or availability of drugs on U.S. streets, and direct human rights violations by the Colombian military have increased since U.S. aid began in 2000. We need a major shift away from fumigation and military aid, and toward alternative development programs and aid to displaced families. I would like you to vote to change this policy, and to prioritize social assistance instead of military aid.