



OFFICE OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

J. HERBERT NELSON, II  
STATED CLERK OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

April 4, 2019

U.S. Ambassador Kevin Whitaker  
United States Embassy  
Calle 24 Bis #48-50  
Santa Fé de Bogotá, Colombia

Dear Ambassador Whitaker,

On behalf of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), I have sent the attached letter to Colombia's President Iván Duque, expressing my dismay over his decision of March 10, 2019, to object to significant aspects of the legislation governing the mandate of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, known as JEP.

President Duque has made it abundantly clear since he began campaigning for office that he is opposed to the peace process, and his objections undermine the terms of the accords reached between the FARC and the Colombian State. The peace accords, signed by former President Juan Manuel Santos, must not be treated as a political position that can be rewritten by subsequent governments; rather, they are a much-needed cornerstone in the work of building peace, which is the right of all Colombians as established in Article 22 of their Constitution.

I had the privilege of visiting Colombia in January and meeting with communities of displaced persons who had suffered at the hands of insurgents, paramilitary groups, and the armed forces. I also met with FARC ex-combatants, all of whom expressed their fervent desire to move forward in building a more stable and peaceful future. I heard repeated concerns over the prospects for full and effective functioning of the JEP and of the Truth Commission, fearing that they may not be able to carry out their tasks without strong support from the Duque government and full funding.

The legal parameters for the functioning of the JEP have been duly defined and reviewed by Colombia's Congress and Constitutional Court. They deserve the full support of our government. To see the U.S. Embassy supporting the objections of the Duque administration raises questions about the U.S. government's commitment to a just and lasting peace in Colombia. We urge you not to cast doubt and uncertainty on a necessary process that is already underway.

I have seen the statement issued by the U.S. Embassy, insisting that justice can still be accomplished for the victims even as the perpetrators are separately tried and possibly extradited to the United States. I must question your confidence in this. As you well know, the extradition of key witnesses in the demobilization process of the AUC paramilitary organization a decade ago left hundreds of victims without the answers that could bring healing and justice through public acknowledgement of what was done to them and their loved ones.

Members of the Presbyterian Church of Colombia joined with thousands of other Colombian citizens in cities across the country on March 18 in order to express their support for the integrity of the functioning of the JEP as an essential part of the peace process. As a Christian minister, I affirm that justice requires actions that promote the healing and well-being of those whose lives have been diminished, threatened, and harmed. I reiterate, on behalf of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the support of our General Assembly for the legal framework approved by Colombia's Congress and Courts for the special work of bringing justice, truth, and guarantees for a more peaceful future for all Colombians.

I urge the U.S. government to reconsider its support of the Duque administration's actions that have placed the JEP in jeopardy and to use its considerable power and influence to help get the peace process back on track.

In the faith we share,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J. Herbert Nelson, II". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Reverend Dr. J. Herbert Nelson, II  
Stated Clerk of the General Assembly  
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)