

Colombian communities send letters to Presidents Obama and Santos rejecting the FTAⁱ

Colombian campesino, indigenous, black and mestizo communities send a letter to Presidents of the US and Colombia on the Plan of Action signed by both nations that allows for forward movement of the Free Trade Agreement.

April 13, 2011 Colombia

President
Barack Obama
United States

President
Juan Manuel Santos
Colombia

We form part of a network of communities and wish to share with you some of our brief ideas and opinions regarding the Plan of Action that you signed. We are speaking from the perspective of our communities in the memory of the thousands of persons killed, disappeared, persecuted and displaced in our history. Memory is necessary for Colombia to become a nation where rights and liberties, equality and participation become the new ethics in politics.

We believe that the Plan of Action between the governments of the United States and Colombia in order to facilitate the Free Trade Agreement excludes fundamental rights. It does not recognize the human rights of the overall Colombia society that have led to the social inequality that a fourth of the citizens of our country are subjected to.

We (as in males and females) who inhabit the rural territories and urban spaces, rural workers associated with the below mentioned organizational groupings that interlinked with our territories and who find ourselves situated in territories experiencing the dynamics of the internal armed conflict, we have been unrecognized and ignored in this Plan of Action.

Labor relations should not be limited to solely the relationship that exists between public and private companies and those who work for them as an employee or part of that company or factory. Our existence has been to protect the environment, rivers, waters, forests, air and ecosystems. We have done this task with vigilance, follow up, monitoring and much attention. Our relationship with these has been done with the strength of our minds, hearts and bodies.

Our interaction with our lands has also included cultivating foods and hunting, which serves in addition to other things, as our main way of surviving. In some cases when there is excess product we transform that to food for others. All of this is also labor.

Our organizations and networks were organized in order to protect our fundamental rights including that to our right to work. This is why we value the concern you have with trade unionists since that is a delicate issue. However, we believe that that concern should also be transfer to the rest of the male and female workforce which includes rural workers like ourselves.

We recognize that there have been advancements in terms of dialogue from the time of Uribe's government to Santos. However, there remains a huge gap between the words and realities. Mr. President Santos, this change in climate has not been sufficient in terms of a change in human rights nor has it changed the negative effects of the internal armed conflict that continue to take place against us. Nor has there been a change in abuses committed by businesses, many of who are linked to crimes and fraud. We invite you to come and get to know this reality. We are not lying to you. Mr. President Obama, the reality is that grave human rights abuses continue to take place against us the rural inhabitants.

We continue to be victims of the impunity that has persisted for the past 15 years. We continue to experience death threats and attempts to physically kill us. We also experience restrictions of freedom of movement and expression. We are excluded from all the substantial decisions made that affect us including the victims and restitution law. Our protests about this are not heard. Paramilitaries continue to act in collusion with the security forces and that police in Urabá antioqueño, bajo atrato, Ariari, San Onofre, Sincelejo, bajo y medio Putumayo, Tumaco, Buenaventura, Argelia, Popayán and Trujillo.

All of this coincides with business operations and companies and industrialists who are beneficiary of paramilitaries and para-politics.

The large scale international investment that has come to Colombia in the past eight years was given to a scandalous government that was highly corrupt. This is a government that allowed extrajudicial killings to take place; a government that embarked in illegal intelligence operations, payed and killed witnesses and who silenced the truth by extraditing (to its favor) perpetrators and showing that it cared for the US victims of drug trafficking (at the detriment of Colombia's victims). This government also used the mecanismo of extradition to hide its own responsibilities in crimes against humanity in Colombia. As a result of this it has left a democracy that has been robbed of its ethics and control over its politics and economy. Operations that allowed for the legalization of the dispossession of

more than 7 million hectares of land under the Uribe government, incentives for Colombian business owners that today coincide with the interest of private investors will become the interests of US investors. Development, its investment and profits for businesses cannot be done on the basis of impunity and completely ignoring those who have lived in these territories and preserved its ecosystems, producing the country's food avoiding a food, energy and environmental crisis. The high value placed on economic private interests cannot be above lives and nature.

The eventual signing of an FTA will have grave consequences on our lives, our existence and territories. These consequences will be recognized in time, even if it is late. They must form part of tripartite discussions between the governments of the United States, Colombia and the communities.

Opening up the US business sector to such unequal, anti-democratic conditions will only lead to a deepening of human rights, environmental degradation, and irreparable environmental damage, extinction of indigenous communities, internal displacement and unjust labor practices. As such, this decision will become a new destabilizing factor that will just lead to increased environmental and food crises.

We call upon you to listen to us and to generate URGENT and PRECISE spaces of dialogue where we can show you the grave humanitarian, human rights and IHL abuses that we are confronting. We also wish to discuss with you the environmental, human rights and food security risks that extractive industrial operations are generating. Many of these are taking place due to commercial agreements that do not include participation of those affected without a broad and sufficient dialogue which one would expect in a real social and political democracy. For there to exist such a democracy there would need to actually exist peace in the country.

We will also be communicating our concerns to members of Congress in both countries under the hope that they will listen to us.

Nos comunicaremos igualmente con los parlamentos de los dos países en la espera de que nos escuchen.

We thank you for your attention and hope to receive your response.

Organizations that form part of the Alternative Network:

Asociación de Zonas Humanitarias y de Biodiversidad de la cuenca del Jiguamiandó, y Curvaradó-Chocó
Resguardo Indígena de Urada Jiguamiandó-Chocó
Comunidades de Autodeterminación Vida y Dignidad – CAVIDA-Chocó

Asociación de Víctimas de la Violencia de Riosucio, CLAMORES
Comunidad indígena de Juin Phubuur-Chocó
Comunidad de Vida y Trabajo "La Balsita"-Dabeiba
Zona Humanitaria CIVIPAZ, Medellín del Ariari - Meta
Asociación de Desarrollo Integral Sostenible Perla Amazónica – ADISPA-Putumayo
Asociación de Productores y Procesadores "Semillas de Paz" - ASPROSEPAZ-Putumayo
Asociación de Productores y Procesadores "Camino al Futuro" - ASPROCAF-Putumayo
Asociación Campesina de Desarrollo Sostenible San Salvador. ASCADES-Putumayo
Juventud Raíces de Dignidad Perla Amazónica. JURADIPA-Putumayo Kwe ´sx ksxa ´w.
Consejo Regional Nación Nasa del departamento del Putumayo.
Grupo porvenir–Zona de biodiversidad de Ancura–Putumayo. Familias campesinas
vereda Puerto Playa, corregimiento Perla Amazónica–Putumayo.
Familias campesinas vereda Guadalupe, corregimiento Perla Amazónica–Putumayo.
Consejo comunitario de la comunidad negra del rio Naya-Valle Resguardo indígena santa
rosa guayacán etnia Nonaam-Valle Asociación agroecológica Esther Cayapú. ASUAESCA-
Trujillo-Valle.
JUBCA. Jóvenes unidos por el Bajo Calima-Valle
Familiares de víctimas de San Antonio-Inzá-Cauca
Familias desplazadas Pro-retorno de Argelia-Cauca
Asociación campesina "Huerto Renacer"-Tequendama-sucre-Cauca
Escuela-Taller Ullucos Zonas de Encuentro, Autonomía y Resistencia indígena nasa-
Resguardo de San Francisco-Toribío-Cauca
Organización campesina de sucre BIENANDANTES-Cauca
Empresa Cooperativa La Alemania, San Onofre.

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