

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

April 28, 2017

Mr. Juan Manuel Santos  
President of Colombia  
Palacio de Nariño  
Carrera 8 No. 7-26  
Bogotá, Colombia

Dear President Santos,

We would like to congratulate you and your negotiators' success in integrating ethnic minorities' recommendations and rights into the peace accord between the Colombian State and Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP). We look forward to continuing our support of Colombia's efforts to make peace a reality through the advancement of the rights of Afro-Colombian and Indigenous communities.

We write you today, however, to raise a number of concerns facing the Afro-Colombian community, to include the security situation. We are alarmed by the increasing number of murders, death threats and attacks against social leaders and human rights defenders.

We are particularly concerned by the security situation in Quibdó, Buenaventura, Cauca and Tumaco. Marino Cordoba, President of the Association for Internally Displaced Afro-Colombians (AFRODES) and a prominent civil rights leader with whom our offices work, had three family members killed between October 2016 and January 2017 in the Riosucio Municipality. Local sources in the Riosucio Municipality believe there has been an increase in paramilitary forces in the area. In the case of AFRODES itself, leaders remain under attack without adequate responses from judicial authorities. For example, on January 17, Emilsen Manyoma, Afro-Colombian leader from Lower Calima from CONPAZ and her partner, Joe Javier Rodallega, were murdered. The above cases are just a small sample of the security incidents involving ethnic minority communities that have come to our attention in recent months.

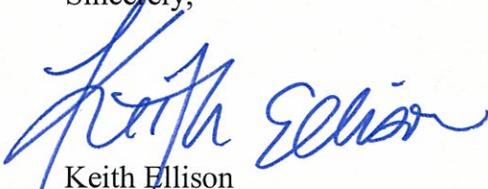
Sadly, the deteriorating security and safety of social leaders and human rights defenders is a problem throughout the country. The office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Colombia recently released its 2016 report in which they observed 389 attacks against human rights defenders, including 59 homicides. The situation is particularly precarious in the mainly Afrodescendant and Indigenous Pacific Coast communities of the country.

While placing security cameras in Quibdó to deter crime is a good first step, we strongly encourage the Colombian government to investigate and bring to justice the persons responsible for the murders of ethnic activists, leaders and community members. It is imperative that Colombia's armed forces and police understand it is their responsibility to protect civilians, particularly in areas like the Chocó and Tumaco, where reports indicate that paramilitary groups operate in zones where the armed forces are present. Cases of alleged collusion or omission of duty by government forces also demand investigation.

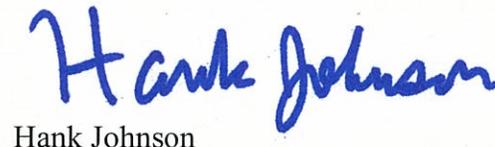
We would also like to voice our concerns regarding the territorial dispute between the Departments of Antioquia and the Chocó. While this is a long-standing issue, we understand it has recently been making headlines. On December 14, 2016, the Senate of Colombia ordered for the Belén de Bajirá to be returned to the Choco and for the Agustín Codazzi Geographic Institute of Colombia (IGAC) to apply articles 11 and 12 of law 1447 that officially marks this territory as part of the Choco. However, in February of this year, reports indicate the Colombia government requested the updated maps to not be published. Such a decision brings into question the government's commitment to protecting the rights of ethnic minorities in the country. The Belén de Bajirá question is not just an issue about demarcation, but also a question of Afro-Colombian access and rights over their ancestral homelands. We respectfully request your government to reconsider its decision and to implement law 13 of 1947 and law 1447 of 2011, making clear that Belen de Bajira forms part of Chocó Department as determined by the IGAC.

We will continue to monitor these situations and the steps taken by the Colombian government to mitigate it as we consider foreign aid authorizations and appropriations to Colombia. We look forward to continuing to work with you to promote peace and justice in Colombia.

Sincerely,



Keith Ellison  
Member of Congress



Hank Johnson  
Member of Congress

CC: Ambassador Kevin Whitaker, Ambassador of the United States to Colombia  
CC: Ambassador Juan Carlos Pinzón, Ambassador of Colombia to the United States