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4TH DISTRICT, GEORGIA

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JUDICIARY

TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-1004

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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, PUBLIC
BUILDINGS AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Nancy Patricia Gutiérrez, Minister of the Interior
Embassy of Colombia
1724 Massachusetts Ave NW
Washington, DC 20036

October 24, 2018

Dear Minister Gutiérrez:

I am writing to express my extreme concern regarding purported paramilitary activity in Buenaventura and the Pacific Coast. A report by the Inter-Ecclesial Commission for Justice and Peace (CIJP) recently stated that the Gaitanista Self-Defense Forces of Colombia entered the humanitarian space of Puente Nayero in the city of Buenaventura without being apprehended by security forces.

I am an ardent supporter of Colombia's peace efforts and I applaud the improvements that have been made in recent years. However, the ongoing killings, attacks on social leaders, and abuses against Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities have hampered the peace process and show that human and labor rights in Colombia are still at risk. It is disturbing to receive so many cases of abuse in Colombia's post-FARC accord environment.

Last year, I detailed my concerns regarding the abuses that took place during the civic strikes in the Pacific region—including the Buenaventura strike of May 2017. I was pleased to learn that this strike ended without further escalation and resulted in a negotiated agreement signed between the Colombian Government and the General Strike Committee. I am following its implementation closely and urge the Government to continue advancing its commitments to the people of Buenaventura.

Given the high level of military presence in this region, I find it highly problematic that illegal armed groups can move about freely and without consequence, and it is discouraging to hear that over 330 social leaders have been murdered since the signing of the peace accords in 2016. While the activity of illegal armed groups poses a threat to many civilians, including Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities, Puente Nayero is of concern because it is a self-declared peace community sanctioned by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. Such measures require that your government guarantee these Afro-Colombian civilians' protection.

Illegal armed groups remain a major problem for the safety and security of Afro-Colombian, indigenous, and social and labor leaders. Four members of the Rio Naya Community Council were disappeared in separate instances on April 17th and May 5th of this year. The second incident happened in front of a representative from Colombia's Human Rights Ombudsman's office.

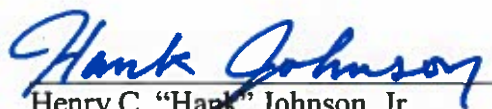
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A thorough investigation and search for these persons has not occurred and since the abduction, the Colombian military entered the protected area and situated itself within populated civilian areas. I strongly urge that your government respect these communities' "zones of refuge" and station the military along the peripheries of these communities—not within them.

Because of this instance of violence and similar encroachments on the peace process, I strongly encourage your government to take steps to dismantle all illegal criminal structures and armed groups in Colombia, to fully implement the commitments made in the FARC peace accord, and to continue peace dialogues with the ELN guerillas. In the case of the four persons who were abducted, I urge you to thoroughly investigate this matter and to bring the perpetrators to justice. I strongly recommend that the government fulfill the commitments it made to end the 2017 civic strike in Buenaventura. I will continue to monitor developments and look forward to continued engagement on these important issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Hank Johnson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.
Member of Congress