

October 18, 2023

Secretary of State Antony Blinken
State Department
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken,

As U.S. and international organizations concerned with peace and human rights in Colombia, we urge the State Department to fully support the ongoing negotiations between the Colombian government and the National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrillas, including by appointing a special envoy to support peace negotiations. We also urge the State Department to continue and increase vigorous diplomatic and financial support for full implementation of the 2016 accords with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

The role of the United States was critical in reaching a negotiated peace with the FARC through the historic 2016 peace accords. While this achieved only a partial peace, it was highly successful in permanently demobilizing some 13,000 FARC combatants, in placing the victims of all armed actors for the first time at the center of Colombian and international debate, and in advancing a significant measure of truth, justice, and reparations. The accords also set new international standards for advancing the role and impact of women in peace accords, tackling the issue of drug policy within such negotiations, and including an unprecedented Ethnic Chapter as part of the final agreement.

Now is the time to declare U.S. support for the ELN negotiations. We recognize that negotiations with ELN are complex and there will be difficulties along the way. Yet under the current government of Gustavo Petro, negotiations have advanced further than during attempts under six previous administrations. The ceasefire launched on August 3rd, 2023 was the product of careful, extensive negotiations over the past year.

The talks are gathering national and international momentum. Norway, Cuba, Venezuela, Mexico, Brazil, and Chile are the “guarantor” countries for the talks. Germany, Switzerland, Sweden, and Spain are “accompanying” the negotiations. The United Nations expanded the mandate of its Colombia mission to encompass the ELN negotiations, and Secretary General Antonio Guterres applauded the June 2023 ceasefire agreement, stating that “these are important steps that give hope to the Colombian people, especially the communities most affected by the conflict.” Colombia’s Catholic Bishops’ Conference and the United Nations are monitoring the ceasefire.

Important sectors of Colombian civil society have backed the negotiations, including Colombia’s largest human rights network, Coordinación Colombia Europa Estados Unidos; Afro-Colombian and Indigenous networks; the Catholic Church and other faith-based organizations; and key sectors of the business community. Representatives of a remarkably broad range of Colombian civil society organizations from

all walks of life are participating in civil society forums related to the talks. The National Committee for Participation was launched, aimed at ensuring civil society participation in the peace process and in monitoring the ceasefire.

This peace negotiation is proving to be viable, and a clear declaration of support from the United States could give it further momentum. As occurred with the FARC peace process, this should include the naming of a special envoy to the talks. An individual viewed by all parties as qualified and credible could play a key role consulting with relevant stakeholders, helping to facilitate discussions, offering technical support, coordinating with partner nations, and informing the rest of the administration and Congress about developments.

In addition to appointing a special envoy and endorsing the talks, we urge the Biden Administration to redouble its commendable efforts to support the full implementation of the 2016 accords. The accord offers a roadmap to modernize and incorporate abandoned rural areas, sustainably tackle illicit drug production, trafficking, and organized crime, and address deep-seated issues that fuel violence and inequality.

We greatly appreciate your pledge committing the United States to accompany the Ethnic Chapter. We urge you to ensure that pledge is fulfilled by using diplomacy as well as financial support to encourage full implementation of the central aspects of the Ethnic Chapter. This includes achieving meaningful ethnic community participation into decision making on implementation of the 2016 peace accords and indeed into every aspect of national life, with an emphasis on collective methods, institutions, and processes.

We also take this opportunity to encourage the State Department to recognize Cuba's constructive role in supporting at the Colombian government's request the Colombian government-ELN negotiations as well as the previous negotiations with the FARC and to remove Cuba from the list of State Sponsors of Terrorism.

Thank you for your support for peace, human rights, and racial justice in Colombia.

Sincerely,

Center for Economic and Policy Research
Center for Gender & Refugee Studies
Center for International Policy
Colombia Acuerdo de Paz NGO
Colombia Human Rights Committee
Demand Progress
Disciples Center for Public Witness (Disciples of Christ)
FOR Peace Presence
Global Exchange
Global Health Partners
Global Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) & United Church of Christ

Humanity & Inclusion

Institute for Policy Studies, Drug Policy Project

Latin America Working Group Education Fund

Loretto Community Latin America/Caribbean Committee

Mennonite Central Committee U.S.

Pax Christi USA

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Office of Public Witness

Presbyterian Peace Fellowship

Protection International

United Church of Christ, Justice and Local Church Ministries

Washington Office on Latin America

Witness for Peace Solidarity Collective