



March 7, 2024

Members of the House and Senate conference committee of the FY24 State, Foreign Operations Appropriations bill

Dear Members of Congress,

As humanitarian, faith, human rights, labor, environmental, Afro-descendant, Colombian American, and other U.S. civil society organizations that have long supported peaceful solutions to the decades of violent conflict in Colombia, we urge you to support the Senate provisions of the FY24 State, Foreign Operations Appropriations bill that provides aid to supports peace and strengthens human rights.

In a world filled with war, violence, and extreme human suffering, Colombia serves as a model for how protracted complex conflicts can be resolved through political negotiation efforts. The historic 2016 peace agreement between the Colombian state and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP) with its transversal ethnic and gender approach remains the world's most comprehensive peace accord. The Petro administration has not only advanced this accord but sought to demobilize and dismantle the country's remaining guerilla and illegal armed groups. Those efforts have resulted in unprecedented bilateral ceasefires. These improve protection for civilians and allow for the construction of agendas that will lead more combatants to lay down their weapons and reintegrate into society. Such efforts offer a path forward to addressing the causes and consequences of illicit economic activities while providing justice for victims. A stable and peaceful Colombia is necessary for addressing the regional issues that are of most importance to lawmakers and the citizens of the United States.

Currently, the most pressing political topic is how best to address immigration. Colombia is a partner and collaborator of the U.S. on this issue. Its humane response has made it the most welcoming country in the region to Venezuelan migrants. With the Los Angeles Declaration, Colombia has shifted its migrant support to focus on economic and social integration. Sustainable integration of migrants in Colombia will lessen the incentive for them to take the perilous journey through the Darien Gap, Central America, and Mexico to reach the U.S.

Colombia and the U.S. are jointly working on advancing more sustainable and effective drug control policies. The drop in coca prices is an opportunity for the U.S. and Colombia to redouble efforts to encourage Colombian farmers to switch from illicit to licit crops and to expand formalized land titles. This will transition them out of coca production and diversify and improve regional economies. Colombia is prioritizing the interdiction of traffickers, targeting money launderers, and investigating and prosecuting corrupt ties between political leaders and members of the security forces with drug traffickers and illegal armed groups.

Likewise, Colombia is a leader and partner in efforts to address deforestation of the Amazon region and climate change—efforts inextricably linked to illicit crop proliferation.

Cutting funding for Colombia in these areas will run directly counter to long-standing bipartisan U.S. goals in the country and the region. This is the moment to consolidate the security, human rights, justice, and peace gains that the U.S. Congress has supported in a bipartisan fashion for decades. While these gains are noteworthy, support is needed to strengthen the momentum forward and to guarantee there is no backsliding on security, drugs, immigration, and human rights.

As such, we reiterate that the U.S. Congress should support the Senate markup of the FY24 bill. This includes:

- 1) \$15 million for USAID's human rights program, which supports respect for human rights, protection of human rights defenders, and peace accord implementation.
- 2) \$25 million for Afro-Colombian and Indigenous communities and organizations.
- 3) Programs for demining, helping farmers transition from illicit activities, formalizing land titles, and returning land to internally displaced persons.
- 4) Support to the tripartite transitional justice system of the 2016 peace accords (the Special Unit for the Search of Disappeared Persons, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, and activities related to the recommendations made by the Truth Commission).
- 5) Programs that support labor rights that implement the U.S. Colombia-Labor Action Plan.
- 6) Assistance to Venezuelans and other migrants and refugees that incorporate the receiving communities.

Additionally, we strongly urge providing \$5 million for the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights office in Colombia (a \$3 million increase from what

is proposed in the Senate report). This office provides invaluable monitoring and technical advice that improves human rights, protects human rights defenders, consolidates peace, and monitors the humanitarian crises in conflictive regions.

Lastly, we support the continuation of the human rights conditions on military and police aid included in the Senate. These conditions are necessary to encourage improvements in respect for human rights by the Colombian security forces and have been in legislation in some form since FY 2000. These conditions have helped to stop horrific abuses from taking place and saved the lives of many at risk.

Thank you for being so supportive of the consolidation of peace and the rule of law in Colombia.

Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA)

Veterans Global Peace Network

The Institute on Race, Equality and Human Rights

Witness for Peace Solidarity Collective

Presbyterian Church (USA), Office of Public Witness

Latin America Working Group (LAWG)

Healing Bridges

Global Black Conferences of African and African Diaspora Studies (CEADA)

FOR Peace Presence

Colombia Human Rights Committee

Colombia Acuerdo de Paz NGO

The Center for Justice and International Law - CEJIL