

OPEN LETTER TO PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA

Italian Network Colombia Vive! European Initiative for the defense of human rights in Colombia
October 30, 2009, meeting with Embassies of the United States and every European Country

Rome, October 12, 2009

Hon. Barack Hussein Obama
President of the United States
Nobel Peace Prize, 2009

The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Copies to:

Sen. John Kerry, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Rep. David Obey, Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee

Purpose: Reflections on the human rights certification given to Colombia, which accomplishes the possible reconfirmation of the bilateral military treaty between the two countries.

Dear President Obama:

We congratulate you on your recent recognition as winner of the Nobel Peace Prize for 2009. Today, October 12, is a symbolic date in the history of Latin American people. We, the undersigned, who consist of European networks, movements, institutions and local entities who work to defend and promote human rights, would like to inform you of our hopes and to ask that you support the creation of real plans that will lead to the end of the armed conflict in Colombia.

The undersigned sympathize with the civilian population who in their daily work are risking their lives, yet refuse the use of weapons. They work to bid a culture of peace; real strategies to resist the violence imposed by the armed actors. Afro-descendant communities, indigenous communities, and peasant farmers throughout Colombia have created these strategies. They are recognized as Communities of Civil Resistance and Peace, working with trade unionists and defenders of human rights.

Because we understand very well the reasons for the persistence of the conflict, which the government has not admitted, and for the violations of fundamental human rights in Colombia, we need to emphasize the seriousness of the social situation that the people of Colombia have to live with. Particularly serious are the violations by the Armed Forces against the civilian population, documented in reports by the most important institutions, and *the "parapolitica" (politicians working together with the paramilitaries)*. *Even the President, Alvaro Uribe Velez, himself has been involved in this, according to the testimony of the drug traffickers extradited to your country.*

We are worried by the fact that, in spite of the complaints that are constantly being made public, the State Department has approved the certification of human rights in Colombia, a certification that allows the possible signing of the bilateral military agreement between Colombia and the United States. According to President Alvaro Uribe, the announced purpose of this agreement is the war on drugs, and according to the United States Ambassador in Bogotá, William Brownfield,

and the intention of the two countries is to “update” cooperation already entrenched. These explanations provide no specific information to help us understand the reasons for the agreement.¹

For this reason, international organizations, *seeking support and coherence from you, recently awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, to strengthen the protection for the civilian population, we want to share some thoughts inspired by the situation in Colombia. We would like you to consider them in your discussions with your advisers.*

First of all, **the human rights situation in Colombia becomes more serious when we consider the extreme vulnerability of the population.** Even members of the U.S. Congress admit that, in spite of support for the security strategy known as “democratic” and applied by President Uribe, numerous violations perpetrated by the Colombian Armed Forces persist.² The collaboration between the Colombian Armed Forces and paramilitary groups has been documented, as has the increase in extrajudicial executions and the systematic murder of civilians, and the serious episodes known as “**false positives**”. We note that the Colombian Attorney General’s office is investigating cases that implicate more than 1.700 military and further that, in the last two years, deputies, senators and high government officials have been charged with being connected with drug traffickers and with the paramilitaries.

It is not hard to imagine that the militarization of Colombia, a country scourged by an armed conflict that the government does not admit, and by endemic political corruption, will lead to an increase in internal destabilization, will involve even more of the civilian population in the war, increasing the violations of human rights and strengthening the resurgence of the paramilitary groups and the receding guerrilla groups. These factors generate major obstacles to all of the attempts at the conquest of democracy and the rule of law and the affirmation of the sovereignty of the Colombian people in matters respecting their own country. On the other hand, in the area of international relations, this agreement will weaken the possibilities for renewing diplomatic relations with neighboring countries.

Secondly, **the possible signing of the bilateral military agreement will perpetuate the military cooperation between the two countries that culminated in 2000 in Plan Colombia. Nevertheless, it has to be admitted that, without any doubt, this strategy has been unsuccessful.**

In spite of the \$6 billion designated for military assistance, for eradication of coca planting, and for the battle against the insurgency, there has been no significant change in these areas. The cultivation and production of coca has not been reduced, nor have the guerrillas been defeated, and the armed conflict continues. The concern expressed in September in a letter directed to you and signed by fifteen members of the U.S. Congress was motivated by the certainty that “the goals of Plan Colombia”³ have not been achieved. This has been confirmed by the report of the General

¹ Cfr. “U.S. Soldiers in Colombia, an Element of Imbalance”. www.colectivodeabogados.org/Militares-estadounidenses-en

² Among the reports that document the Army’s attacks on the civilian population in Colombia, we emphasize the following: **report from Colombia Support Network provides an outline of events reported officially or in the U.S. and Colombian media, describing terrorism, thievery, bungling and massacres by the armed forces of the government of Colombia. (Updated August 24, 2009)** The CSN-Colombia Support Network. <http://www.colombiasupport.net>

³ Cfr. “Congressional Democrats state in a letter to President Obama that increased U.S. military participation will aggravate the failures of Plan Colombia”, <http://www.colectivodeabogados.org/Mayor-participacion-militar>

Accountability Office (GAO) in October 2008. Proof of the failure of Plan Colombia implies a reflection, first of all ethical, on the effectiveness of a military answer to a phenomenon that has deep roots in Colombia: denial of human rights and violence.

We have not forgotten that the cancellation of the military agreement between the United States and Ecuador regarding the base at Manta was motivated, as the military themselves admit, because the initial objective of checking and reducing drug trafficking was not accomplished. The fact that, on the contrary, drug trafficking has visibly increased, leads us to doubt the effectiveness of military agreements in the fight against these problems.

It should be added, without hiding our deep concern, that **the interest stated to Colombia by the U.S. Air Command in its official document, is not the hope of fighting drug trafficking, but rather the desire to establish seven bases⁴ that can be converted into air corridors for the United States.** The purpose for those is to assure presence, mobility and positioning for U.S. military operations in a country whose position in the region is strategic, **thus endangering all of the democracies in Latin America.**

This military agreement is incompatible with the Colombian Constitution of 1991 and the guarantee of justice, because the stationing of foreign troops must be established by treaty or by an international convention. These require legal approval for the Colombian Congress and a ruling of constitutionality by the Constitutional Court. Even though President Uribe has stated that this agreement is part of an existing treaty, there is no basis to confirm that.

It has to be emphasized, Mr. President, that the preceding United States administrations and the Colombian governments has carried forward a manipulation of this conflict in order to ensure control of Colombia's territory. Their purpose was to apply a political and economic model of forced development that thwarted any respect for the fundamental rights of the Colombian people.

As you certainly must know, Colombia will celebrate in 2010 the bicentennial of its independence, but, because of the foregoing, it is unquestionable that the military agreements with the United States, along with the economic and commercial agreements recently signed, condemn the Colombian people to total subordination and dependence and to a denial of their right to choose their political and economic way of life.

Therefore, **Your Excellency, Mr. President Obama, 2009 Nobel Peace Laureate**

The undersigned feel a moral obligation to reinforce and make public our certainty that ***militarization will not bring peace, nor will it guarantee better conditions in life for the Colombian people, no can it reduce their marginalization and poverty. Rather, on the contrary, it will magnify the existing unjust social structures and put at grave risk all who are promoting a culture of peace.***

For this reason we ask you earnestly to listen to the voice of the people and turn your attention and your appreciation to the needed humanitarian interchange that Colombian men and women are developing for peace, with immense effort and courage.

⁴ Cfr. "**Pentagon plans Latin America-wide intervention ability for new military base in Colombia**", http://www.nobases.org/show_news/pentagon_plans_latin_america_wide_intervention_ability_for_new_military_base_in_colombia. The bases are Malambo (Atlantico Province); Palanquero (Magdalena Medio Province); Apiay (Meta Province); the naval bases at Cartagena and el Pacifico; and now, the training center at Tolomaida and the Army base at Larandia (Cauqueta Province).

Since we have very high expectations for your administration, we urge you to reconsider the agreements with Colombia, respecting and applying the principles of honesty and firmness on the subject of human rights.

Cordially,

Italian organizations

Narni: Rete Italiana di Solidarietà Colombia Vive!; Comune di Narni; Associazione Narni per la Pace

Roma: LIBERA. *Associazioni, nomi e numeri contro le mafie*; Associazione A SUD; MIR *Movimento Internazionale di Riconciliazione*; Fondazione Lelio Basso, sezione internazionale; Centro Studi Difesa Civile - CSDC

Genova: Comunità Cristiana di Base di Oregina; Transcultura Donna Onlus;

Cascina: Comune di Cascina, Assessore Roberto Lorenzi.

Pisa: Edizioni per la pace "Quaderni Satyagraha".

Treviso : AVI *Associazione Volontariato Insieme* (Montebelluna); NATS Onlus *Rete di amicizia e sostegno con i bambini lavoratori e di strada del sud del mondo*.

Perugia: Circolo Culturale Primomaggio

Spanish organizations

Madrid: ONG XXI Solidario; Red de Mujeres de Negro Contra la Guerra

Barcelona: Colectivo Maloka; ColCat

Austrian organizations

Vienna: International Fellowship of Reconciliation, IFOR - Austrian branch; FIAN - Food First Information Action Network;

France organizations

Paris: ACAT, Action des Chrétien pour l'abolition de la Torture

Portugal organizations

Tamera: Instituto por la Paz Global, Phoebe Andrea Regelman

Belgium organizations

Westerlo: Alcaldía de Westerlo, *alcalde y consejal de cooperación Harry Plettinx*; Federación de Parroquias de Herselt, Hulshout y Westerlo; Alianza por la Paz Comunidad de Paz de San José de Apartadó, Paulus de Wolf y Sus Van Olmen;

Bruxelles: 'Comité de Derechos Humanos Daniel Gillard'; Solidarité Socialiste - FCD (Fonds de Coopération au Développement)ONG.

Switzerland organizations

Luzern: Grupo de Trabajo Suiza-Colombia (Arbeitsgruppe Schweiz-Kolumbien ask).

United States organizations

Madison (Wi): CSN *Colombia Support Network*; FOR *Fellowship of Reconciliation*; Across the Americas.

People

Italia -Vittorio Agnoletto, *ex eurodeputato Gue/Ngl – Sinistra unitaria europea*; Milò Bertolotto, *Assessora Iniziative per la Pace della Provincia di Genova*; Annalisa Melandri, *giornalista*; Michele Ciricillo; Gaia Capogna; Mauro del Muto; Andrea Ciantar; Concetta Rudi; Ivana Faranda; Monica Ciccinelli; Alessandro Ciamarra; Alberto Barbieri; Elisa Bistocchi; Manuel Papi; Margherita Pisegna; Camilo Cefalo; Leonardo Monducci – esponente movimento umanista; Gladis Rivas esponente movimento umanista; Sergio Berretta; Leonardo Valderrama. **España** - Caterina Heyck Puyana, *Investigadora Doctorado Instituto de la Paz y los Conflictos Universidad de Granada*; Natalia Biffi; Josep Canals –Tarragona.



Rete Italiana di Solidarietà, Colombia Vive! Onlus
Comune di Narni, Ufficio per la Pace, Piazza dei Priori, 1 - 05035 Narni (Tr) Italia
reteitalianadisolidarieta@gmail.com
presidente Andrea Proietti proietta@comune.narni.tr.it