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Over 150 Scholars Call on Georgetown U. to fire Alvaro Uribe

Washington, DC: Students are delivering an open letter to Georgetown University President John J. DeGioia today, signed by over 150 scholars, urging the university to reconsider its appointment of former president of Colombia Álvaro Uribe as a visiting scholar. Signed by a number of Georgetown professors, leading scholars on Colombia, and many others, the letter objects to Uribe's ties to paramilitary groups, the "false positives" scandal (in which members of the Colombian military killed civilians and dressed the bodies in the uniforms of guerrillas), corruption and human rights violations in his administration, manipulation of the judiciary, and a notorious wiretapping scandal, as among their concerns over Uribe's appointment.

"Given the human rights scandals associated with Álvaro Uribe's administration, and the ties between his administration and illegal paramilitary groups, it is disturbing that Georgetown University has chosen to host him this year," said Lesley Gill, Professor and Chair of Anthropology at Vanderbilt University.

Signers of the letter include Joanne Rappaport, a Colombia expert and Professor of Anthropology and Spanish and Portuguese at Georgetown University; Greg Grandin, Professor of History at New York University and author of the Pulitzer Prize Finalist book *Fordlandia*; Yale University professor Gilbert M. Joseph; and Father Ray Kemp, Senior Fellow at the Woodstock Theological Center at Georgetown, among many others.

The full text of the letter follows:

John J. DeGioia
President
Georgetown University

September 27, 2010

Dear Sir,

Concerning former Colombian President Álvaro Uribe's appointment at Georgetown's Walsh School of Foreign Service as "Distinguished Scholar in the Practice of Global Leadership," we would like to signal our agreement with the basic thrust of the open letter Father Javier Giraldo Moreno, S.J., wrote to peace activist Father John Dear, S.J., on September 6, 2010, and add our support for Father Dear's efforts to have Mr. Uribe removed from his post.

We reproduce the text of the letter from Father Giraldo to Father Dear:

Dear John,

I send you fraternal, loving greetings.

I write to you with great concern regarding the fact that our Jesuit university, Georgetown, has hired former president of Colombia Álvaro Uribe Vélez, as a professor. I am constantly receiving messages from individuals and groups who have suffered enormously during his term as president. They are protesting and questioning the mindset of our Company, or its lack of ethical judgment in making a decision of this kind.

It is possible that decision makers at Georgetown have received positive appraisals from Colombians in high political or economic positions, but it is difficult to ignore the intense moral disagreements aroused by his government and the investigations and sanctions imposed by international organizations that try to protect human dignity. The mere fact that, during Uribe's political career, while he was governor of Antioquia Department (1995-1997), he founded and protected so many paramilitary groups, known euphemistically as "Convivir" ("To Live Together"), who murdered and "disappeared" thousands of people and displaced multitudes, committing many other atrocities, would imply a need for moral censure before entrusting him with any future responsibility.

But not only did he continue to sponsor those paramilitary groups, but he defended them and he perfected them into a new pattern of legalized paramilitarism, including networks of informants, networks of collaborators, and the new class of private security companies that involve millions of civilians in military activities related to the internal armed conflict, while at the same time lying to the international community with a phony demobilization of the paramilitaries.

In addition, the scandalous practice of "false positives" took place during Uribe's administration. The practice consists in murdering civilians, usually peasants, and after killing them, dressing them as combatants in order to justify their deaths. That is the way he tried to demonstrate bogus military victories over the rebels and eliminate the activists in social movements that work for justice.

The corruption during his administration was more than scandalous, not just because of the presence of drug traffickers in public positions, but also because the Congress and many government offices were occupied by criminals. Today more than a hundred members of Congress are involved in criminal proceedings, all of them President Uribe's closest supporters.

The purchase of consciences in order to manipulate the judicial apparatus was disgraceful. It ended up destroying, at the deepest level, the moral fabric of the country. Another disgrace was the corrupt manner in which the ministers closest to him manipulated agricultural policy in order to favor the very rich with public money, meanwhile impeding and stigmatizing social projects. The corruption of his sons, who enriched themselves by using the advantages of power, scandalized the whole country.

In addition, Uribe used the security agency directly under his control (the Department of Administrative Security) to spy on the courts, opposition politicians, and social and human rights movements, by means of clandestine telephone tapping. The corrupt machinations he used to obtain his re-election as President in 2006 were sordid in the extreme, with the result that ministers and close collaborators have almost been jailed.

He manipulated the coordination between the Army and the paramilitary groups that resulted in 14,000 extrajudicial executions during his term of office. His strategies of impunity for those who, through the government or the “para-government,” committed crimes against humanity will go down in history for their brazenness.

The decision by the Jesuits at Georgetown to offer a professorship to Álvaro Uribe, is not only deeply offensive to those Colombians who still maintain moral principles, but also places at high risk the ethical development of the young people who attend our university in Washington. Where are the ethics of the Company of Jesus?

I am writing these lines to you because I am sure that you will share our concerns and perhaps you can forward them to the Jesuits at Georgetown and to other circles of thoughtful persons you know and to those who are in sympathy with justice.

With a fond embrace,
Javier Giraldo Moreno, S.J.

We hope you will reconsider your decision to appoint Álvaro Uribe at Georgetown in light of the concerns noted above. His presence there is an affront to scholars and their educational mission.

Sincerely,

Osama Abi-Mershed, Assistant Professor of History, Georgetown University

Rodolfo Acuña, Professor of Chicano/a Studies, California State University, Northridge

Sonia E. Alvarez, Leonard J. Horwitz Professor of Latin American Politics and Society,
University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Mark Anderson, Associate Professor of Anthropology, University of California, Santa
Cruz

Tim Anderson, Senior Lecturer in Political Economy, University of Sydney

Juan Manuel Arbona, Associate Professor and Chair, Growth and Structure of Cities
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Benjamin Arditi, Professor, Centro de Estudios Politicos, Facultad de Ciencias Politicas y
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Noam Chomsky, Institute Professor and Professor of Linguistics, Massachusetts Institute
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George Ciccariello-Maher, Assistant Professor of Political Science, Drexel University

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