

Mingas-FTA

August 10, 2009

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Secretary Hillary Rodham Clinton
Department of State
2201 C St. NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton,

The United States government's decision to obtain concessions for the use of multiple military bases in Colombia is a matter of grave concern to us. Given that the appalling record of human rights abuses under President Uribe's government has led President Obama's administration to place conditions on its support for the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement, it makes no sense for the administration to turn around and offer backing to that regime by increasing U.S. military presence in Colombia.

As an organization that rejects the armed struggles and kidnappings that have plagued Colombia for decades, we are convinced intensified U.S. military activity in the country would only exacerbate ongoing armed conflicts and interfere with efforts at negotiated solutions. Claims that these foreign troops on Colombian soil will be focused on the so-called war on drugs without their operations spilling into other areas strain credulity, especially since one of the pretexts being given for the agreement is that the bases are needed as part of the "war on terror"—a term used by the previous U.S. administration to define anything it saw fit to attack.

It is very important for Colombia to maintain cordial relations with the United States within a framework of mutual respect for each country's sovereignty and the pursuit of bilateral benefits. But the agreement to place U.S. troops in seven different locations in Colombia constitutes a violation of national sovereignty: there is no law on the books in Colombia that would permit this kind of agreement. According to the Colombian Constitution, no foreign troops may be stationed in Colombia on a permanent basis. Furthermore, the agreement would keep U.S. troops beyond the reach of Colombian courts so that foreign soldiers and mercenaries would be able—as they have in other places—to commit all manner of crimes with impunity.

This enlarged U.S. military undertaking is an expansion of the fateful Plan Colombia, which has caused serious losses to Colombian agriculture as well as social and

environmental problems. Plan Colombia and the proposed U.S.-Colombia FTA, which would make permanent the destruction caused by Plan Colombia, are both tools for the ongoing submission of the Colombian nation to the greed of U.S. multinational corporations.

Coming on the heels of the coup d'etat in Honduras, carried out by military officers with close links to the Pentagon, and of the reactivation of the U.S. Fourth Fleet in the Caribbean, the agreement for use of military bases is no minor matter: it would signify a dangerous expansion of U.S. military activity in Latin America, and has already escalated tensions in the region.

This policy decision by the U.S. government is a losing proposition from any angle. It would not benefit the people of either the United States or Colombia. Rather than promote peace, it would raise military tensions both internally in Colombia and in the region as a whole.

For the good of the people of the United States and Colombia, we ask that the plan to station increased numbers of U.S. military personnel on seven Colombian bases be abandoned.

Respectfully,

Mingas-FTA

**Mingas-FTA is a group of individuals from across the United States, Canada and Colombia who are concerned with promoting sovereignty and economic development, strengthening democracy and improving labor conditions in Colombia.

We are integrated within the Hemispheric Social Alliance and are active in North America. We are united in our support for social movements and our rejection of all acts of violence in Colombia, regardless of their source.