

April 23, 2007

Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the House of Representatives

Congressman Charles Rangel, Chair, Ways and Means Committee

Congressman Sander Levin, Chair, Trade Subcommittee, Ways and Means

Dear Honorable Members of Congress:

We address this open letter to you as leaders of the Democratic majority in Congress. We urge you to vote against the proposed Free Trade Agreement (FTA) which is being considered along with further military aid to Colombia. There are good trade agreements between countries, but this agreement is not good for the people of either the United States or Colombia. There are many reasons to oppose it.

The FTA would increase drug availability on U.S. streets, and it would damage Colombia's agriculture, destroying the country's food self-sufficiency. Increased importation of U.S. crops to Colombia would force peasants into the cultivation of illicit crops. Growing coca and poppies would be the only economically viable option for many decent peasants and rural workers.

The FTA would add to global warming by causing severe ecological damage to the tropical forests and virgin lands of Colombia, in addition to the negative environmental effects which are already caused by the chemicals used to spray coca crops. The FTA limits itself to demanding that Colombia's government comply with its own very lax environmental laws, which have been aggressively weakened in recent years.

The FTA would result, like other treaties with Mexico and Central America, in increased unauthorized migration to the United States. NAFTA has been a disaster for Mexican farmers. It has driven many of them off the land, into the cities and northward to the United States in search of employment and income. If the Colombia FTA passes, we can expect more undocumented migrants.

The FTA would result in more unemployment among U.S. workers and pressure to lower wages in this country. Our workers would be exposed to competition with a labor market that is notorious for its extensive labor and human rights violations. U.S. workers are struggling for a living wage, and this would be a setback in that struggle.

The FTA is being negotiated with a government implicated in severe violations of human rights via its cooperation with paramilitary death squads. Nearly one hundred political leaders close to President Uribe are in jail, fugitives from the law, or implicated in the operations of paramilitary organizations. There are already nine members of the Colombian Congress, all close allies of the Uribe administration, who have been indicted by the Colombian Supreme Court for their involvement with the paramilitaries.

The United States already supports this government with military and financial aid via the costly 2001 Plan Colombia and the Andean Regional Initiative, which have failed completely in their publicly stated goal of reducing coca and opium poppy production by 50%. But it has resulted in enormous ecological damage caused by fumigation and disproportional displacement of indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities. The Colombian military has used U.S. aid to strengthen its campaign against guerrilla groups. In the name of fighting the guerillas, severe violations of human rights and attacks against the civilian population have taken place. Some of these operations, which in numerous cases appear closely connected with paramilitary depredations, have forced peasants off their land.

Colombia has more than 3.7 million displaced people, second only to Sudan in the world. Small plots abandoned by peasants, Afro-Colombians, and indigenous people have been taken over by elements linked to narcotraffickers and turned into large landholdings. The FTA would exacerbate and make permanent the victimization of the peasant population and would have a very negative impact on agriculture in general.

Property acquired by force and/or drug money is being declared legal by the Colombian government, and the land cultivation is being changed to either coca cultivation or, as per the FTA model, from

food staples to large-scale export crops, such as tropical fruits, or large-scale plantations of African palm for biofuel production. These changes undermine local food self-sufficiency, while benefiting a few corporate giants. Public opinion worldwide is highly critical of the current U.S. administration's cooperation and support of these oppressive conditions in Colombia.

The FTA is so fundamentally flawed that no number of "side letters" of intent, or special attachments and amendments, can fix it. If you vote for this agreement, you would be voting for increased availability of drugs on U.S. streets, increased environmental destruction, increased unauthorized immigration, increased suffering for the middle class, support for a government that is involved in severe human rights violations, support for a humanitarian crisis of gigantic proportions in Colombia, and increased damage to our international moral standing.

Please vote against the FTA and further military aid to Colombia.

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