

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 1, 2006

The Honorable Secretary of State Dr Condoleezza Rice
Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Madam Secretary,

We are writing to ask you to refrain from certifying that the Colombia government meets the human rights conditions included in P.L. 108-447 and P.L. 109-102, the Foreign Operations Appropriations Acts for FY2005 and FY2006, until the Colombian Army's 17th Brigade improves its human rights practices. We also believe that certification requires more substantial progress in prosecuting a number of other outstanding cases involving allegations of gross human rights violations involving members of the Colombian army, including the killing of three trade union leaders in Arauca, the killing of a family in Cajamarca, and the Mapiripan massacre. Since the inception of Plan Colombia, Congress has approved and President Bush has signed into law a requirement that the Colombian government prosecute key cases of alleged human rights abuses by members of Colombia military.

The record of the 17th Brigade is especially deplorable with regard to the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó in northwestern Colombia. More than 160 members of the community have been killed by paramilitary groups, leftist guerrillas, and army soldiers since the community pledged not to support any of the armed groups operating in Colombia in 1997.

In February 2005, eight community residents, including three children, were brutally killed in a massacre that witnesses reported was carried out by the Colombian army. This massacre was one of several cases that led the State Department to delay its certification of the human rights conditions for several months in 2005. At the time of certification in August 2005, the Colombian Attorney General's office had made no progress that we are aware of in the investigation of this massacre. We believe that in the absence of any charges against those responsible, further violence against members of the Peace Community ensued.

We were deeply disturbed to learn of the killing of Arlen Salas David on November 17, 2005, which occurred, according to eyewitness accounts, after an army soldier fired a grenade as Salas and others were weeding a cornfield. Shortly after, according to community members and a local teacher, soldiers fired on the village itself, shooting at a school and wounding a second person, Hernán Goez. A delegation from the community and an international observer who took Goez to the hospital were detained by a group of soldiers from the 17th Brigade who allegedly said they were going to kill them and destroy the community.

On January 12, 2006, according to a military spokesman quoted in the Colombian newspaper "El Colombiano," the Army killed Edilberto Vásquez Cardona, a member of

the Peace Community. While the Army does not contest that it killed Vásquez Cardona, it asserts that he was a guerrilla, which community members insist is not the case.

The US Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), an interfaith organization that has permanent human rights observers in San José de Apartadó, has been harassed by Colombian Army soldiers operating in the area. In October 2005, a Colombian soldier in San José was overheard threatening to "cut off the head" of a FOR observer.

The Department of State's certification decision transmitted to Congress last August records more than 200 reports of violations by the 17th Brigade against members of the Peace Community. The 17th Brigade has also been implicated in collaboration with paramilitary groups and for human rights violations against Afro-Colombian communities.

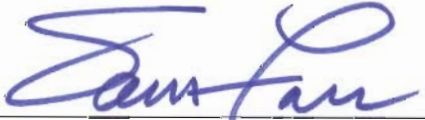
We applaud the decision, noted in your certification letter of August 2005, that the US "will not consider providing assistance to the 17th Brigade until all significant human rights allegations involving the unit have been credibly addressed." Because the Brigade is a component of the Colombian Armed Forces' command structure and has been implicated in the above referenced human rights violations, we implore you to abide by both the letter of the law and the spirit of the law by withholding human rights certification for Colombia until the following conditions are met:

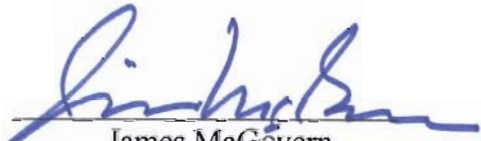
- (a) the Colombian Prosecutor's office follows all available leads and shows substantial progress in investigations into the most serious crimes against the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó, no matter who the perpetrators may be,
- (b) in the specific case of the 17th Brigade, its leadership is suspended from duty until such a time that full and impartial criminal investigations establish those officers' innocence or guilt, and
- (c) there is substantial reform of the 17th Brigade's operations, as reflected in its conduct in San José de Apartadó, Afro-Colombian communities, and other communities within its jurisdiction.

We believe that withholding certification at this time will contribute to stimulating the political will in Colombia to address these issues that the Congress is monitoring. These steps are necessary in addition to progress on other well-known cases of credible allegations of human rights violations by members of the security forces.

Thank you for your consideration of this important matter.

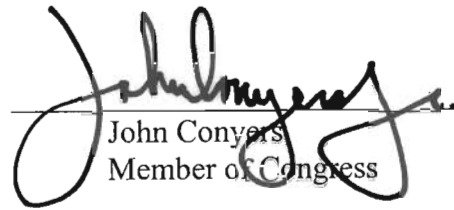
Sincerely,


Sam Farr
Member of Congress

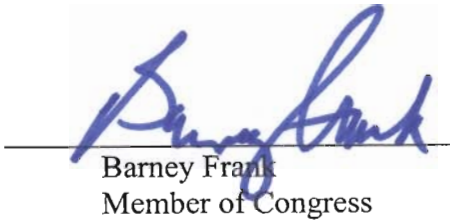

James McGovern
Member of Congress



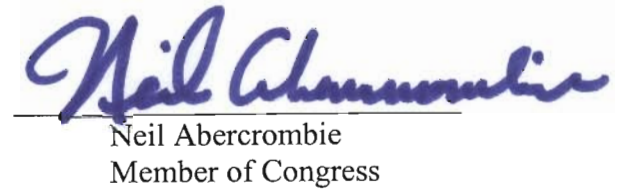
Nita Lowey
Member of Congress



John Conyers
Member of Congress



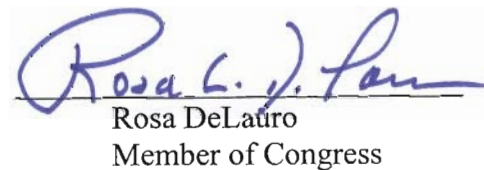
Barney Frank
Member of Congress



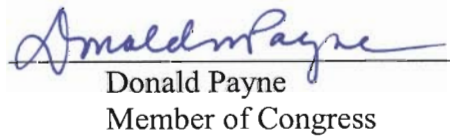
Neil Abercrombie
Member of Congress



Chaka Fattah
Member of Congress



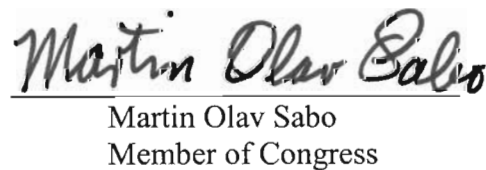
Rosa DeLauro
Member of Congress



Donald Payne
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Gregory Meeks
Member of Congress




Martin Olav Sabo
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Peter DeFazio
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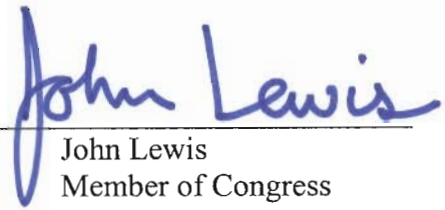
Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress



Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress



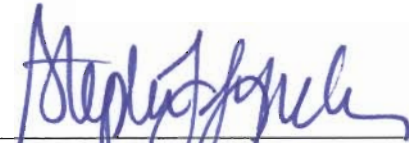
Lane Evans
Member of Congress



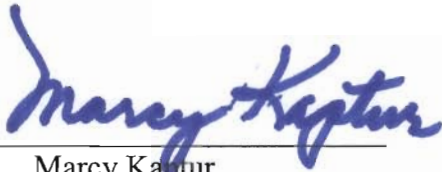
John Lewis
Member of Congress



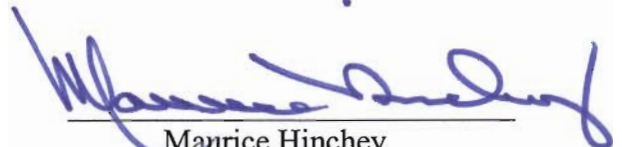
Marty Meehan
Member of Congress



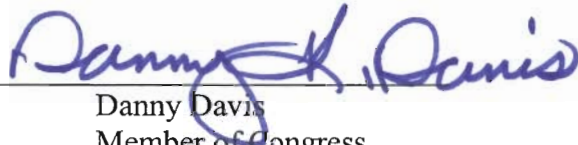
Stephen F. Lynch
Member of Congress



Marcy Kaptur
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Maurice Hinchey
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Danny Davis
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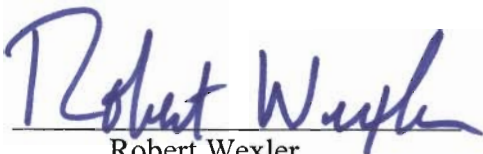
Doris Matsui
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Bernard Sanders
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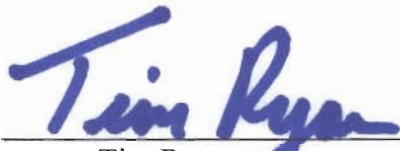
David Price
Member of Congress

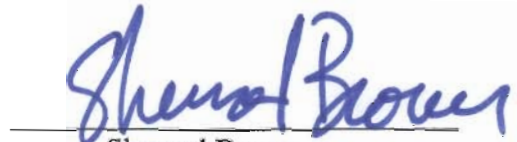


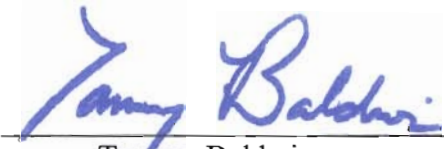
Robert Wexler
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Loretta Sanchez
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Tim Ryan
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Sherrod Brown
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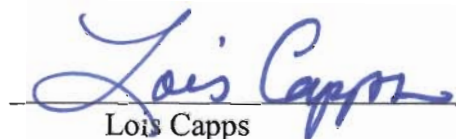

Tammy Baldwin
Member of Congress

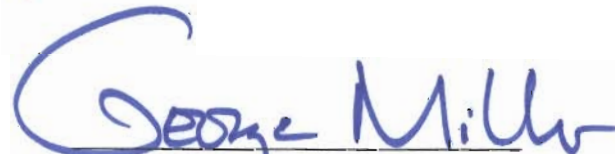

Dennis Kucinich
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Mike Honda
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Betty McCollum
Member of Congress


Jim McDermott
Member of Congress

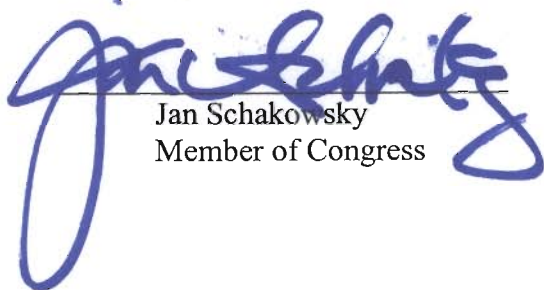

Lois Capps
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Charlie Rangel
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Lloyd Doggett
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Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress



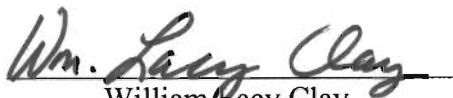
Rep. Barbara Lee
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Jim Langevin
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Cynthia McKinney
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William Lacy Clay
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Rick Larsen
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Michael R. McNulty
Member of Congress



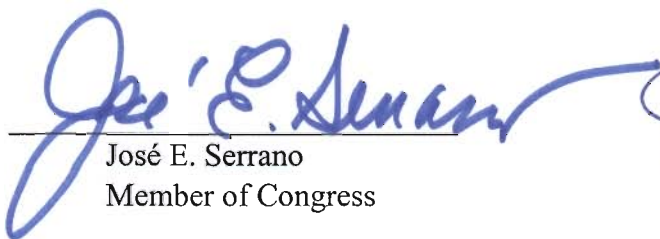
Luis Gutiérrez
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Rush Holt
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Gwen Moore
Member of Congress



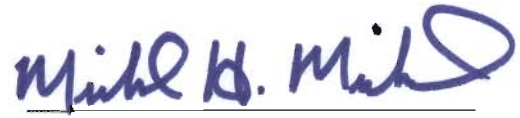
José E. Serrano
Member of Congress



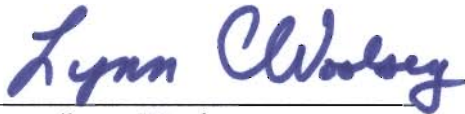
James Oberstar
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Tom Lantos
Member of Congress



Michael Michaud
Member of Congress



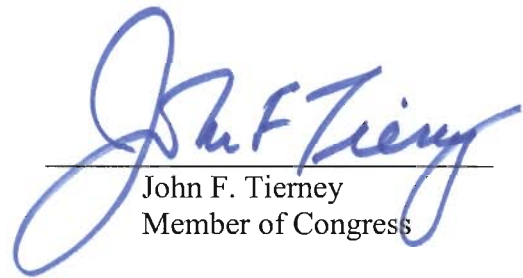
Lynn Woolsey
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Bobby L. Rush
Member of Congress



Fortney Pete Stark
Member of Congress



John F. Tierney
Member of Congress

March 2, 2006

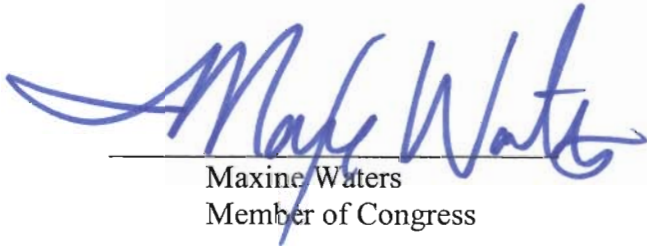
Addendum to Colombia Human Rights Certification Letter to:
The Honorable Secretary of State Dr Condoleezza Rice
Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520



Robert Andrews
Member of Congress



Linda Sanchez
Member of Congress



Maxine Waters
Member of Congress