



human rights *first*

30th
ANNIVERSARY
CELEBRATE
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June 26, 2009

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

Dear President Obama,

Key Human Rights Messages for Meeting with President Uribe

We, the below-signed 1,047 individuals, join Human Rights First in writing to urge you to place human rights at the top of the agenda for your meeting with Colombian President Alvaro Uribe on June 29, 2009. It is vital that both privately and publicly you express the importance that the United States places on respect for human rights in Colombia, in particular the U.S. desire to see President Uribe support the work of Colombian human rights defenders.

On October 15, 2008, you stood up for Colombia's labor rights activists by stating, "[t]he history in Colombia right now is that labor leaders have been targeted for assassination on a fairly consistent basis and there have not been prosecutions." We ask that you are similarly forthright during your meeting with President Uribe. Pressure from the United States has positively impacted the human rights situation in Colombia and your continued engagement will have tangible results on the ground.

We respectfully urge you to raise the following issues with President Uribe:

1. Delay Free Trade Agreement until Labor Rights Activists are Protected

We urge you to tell President Uribe that your administration's position on the Free Trade Agreement will depend on progress in stopping government harassment against trade unionists, as well as holding perpetrators accountable for murders of labor rights activists. For free trade to benefit workers, their labor leaders must also be free to speak out without fear of reprisal. Trade union leaders are assassinated at alarming rates in Colombia and President Uribe's administration has incited violence against them by repeatedly labeling them violent guerrillas.

2. End Harassment of Human Rights Defenders

We urge you to request that President Uribe stop both his dangerous and false rhetoric against Colombian human rights defenders and his widespread baseless prosecutions of activists as guerrillas. We also ask that you publicly recognize that civil society's efforts to deal with past atrocities and new human rights violations strengthen democracy and

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the rule of law. President Uribe and members of his government regularly label non-violent human rights activists as terrorists, encouraging harassment against them such as death threats and trumped-up criminal charges accusing them of supporting violent guerrillas.

3. Stop Illegal Surveillance and Wiretapping

We urge you to seek a comprehensive investigation into the growing scandal in Colombia demonstrating that the national intelligence agency (DAS) engaged in widespread wiretaps and surveillance of Supreme Court judges, journalists, opposition members and human rights defenders. In addition to illegal wiretapping, official documents obtained by the Attorney-General's office reportedly prove that intelligence officials, who were charged with protecting human rights defenders, actually sent the defenders death threats. We understand that the documents also demonstrate that intelligence officials engaged in "intelligence offensives" designed to fabricate information about defenders for use in specious criminal investigations.

4. End Extrajudicial Executions

We urge you stress the importance of ending extrajudicial executions by Colombian security forces, and fully investigating and prosecuting those responsible. The UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial Executions recently stated that extrajudicial executions by the Colombian army constitute "cold-blooded, premeditated murder of innocent civilians for profit" that are "more or less systematic" and have not been sufficiently investigated.

5. Obtain the Truth from Extradited Paramilitary Leaders

We urge you to formulate a plan with President Uribe to provide incentives for extradited paramilitary leaders to tell the truth about the serious human rights violations they committed. These paramilitary leaders are being prosecuted in the United States for drug trafficking crimes. Meanwhile, the victims of their widespread mass atrocities are in peril of losing the opportunity to discover the truth about those crimes; a truth that is vital to aid Colombia's reconciliation from decades of brutal armed conflict. The US government has repeatedly stated that it is committed to helping victims seek the truth about the crimes committed by the extradited paramilitaries.

We are confident that by raising these topics with President Uribe you will not only enhance the rule of law and respect for human rights in Colombia, but also strengthen U.S. security interests.

Sincerely,

The names of the 1,047 signatories have been hidden for privacy reasons.