

IRTF

InterReligious Task Force on Central America
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Ambassador Michael Kozak
Acting Assistant Secretary of State
Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, & Labor
U.S. Department of State
April 12, 2005

Dear Ambassador Kozak:

On March 3 we wrote to officials in the Colombian government concerning the February 21-22 massacre of eight men, women and children in San José de Apartadó in northwest Colombia. Internationally respected peace leader and co-founder of the San José Peace Community Luis Eduardo Guerra, his son and partner were among the victims. Witnesses identified their assassins as members of the Colombian military.

Given allegations of military involvement in this atrocity, we strongly urge the Department of State to withhold certification of assistance to the Colombian military until there is a transparent, impartial investigation and prosecution by civilian authorities of the authors of this massacre. In addition, certification should not be granted until there is effective investigation and prosecution of army officials involved in human rights abuses and until we can affirm that there is greater progress in breaking links between the army and paramilitary forces.

We are especially concerned by President Uribe's statements on March 20 accusing leaders and defenders of the Peace Community of lending support to the FARC guerrillas. These broad public statements put at risk all residents of San José de Apartadó, as well as those who accompany them.

As a result of these reports and our grave concerns, **we respectfully urge the State Department to respond through the following actions:**

- Vigorously pressure the Colombian government to conduct transparent investigations in civilian courts and prosecute those responsible.
- Direct the U.S. Embassy to issue a public statement condemning the massacre and to visit San José de Apartadó to show concern for the community's safety.
- Call on the Colombian government to provide protective measures to the community in consultation with community members, as required by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.
- Support the Peace Community's need for protective measures to exclude the presence of armed forces inside the community's populated areas.
- Send a strong message to the Colombian government on human rights by denying certification until the armed forces severs its links with paramilitaries and the Colombian government takes effective action against impunity for these crimes.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Coordinator

cc: Luis Alberto Moreno, Colombian Ambassador to the US ~ via fax: 1 202 232 8643
William B Wood, US Ambassador to Colombia ~ via fax: 011-571-315-2197
Heather Merritt, Desk Officer for Colombia, US State Dept ~ via fax: 202.647.2628
U.S. Senators DeWine and Voinovich ~ via fax, email
U.S. Representatives Brown, Kaptur, Kucinich, LaTourette, Ryan, Tubbs Jones ~ via fax, email

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The following people hereby urge you to take action on this matter as indicated in this letter: