

OPEN LETTER FROM FORMER SENIOR OFFICIALS IN
DEMOCRATIC ADMINISTRATIONS AND DEMOCRATIC MEMBERS OF CONGRESS
SUPPORTING THE
UNITED STATES-COLOMBIA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

We, the undersigned, who have served in senior positions in the U.S. government, strongly urge Congress to take up and approve the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement this year. We believe this Agreement is in both our vital national security and economic interests. We feel that the treaty should be considered as soon as possible and that any obstacles be quickly and amicably resolved.

There is an overwhelming national security imperative to approving the Colombia FTA. There is a growing animus in some parts of the hemisphere toward the U.S., but Colombia has long been a traditional friend, and Colombian President Uribe has been a strong and faithful ally of the United States. To turn our back on the Colombia FTA would be a severe blow to that relationship and would send a very negative message to our friends in a volatile region. It is no coincidence that the leaders of Mexico, Chile, Canada, Guatemala, Costa Rica, and Peru among others, have strongly supported this treaty in the name of hemispheric solidarity. Failure to act would strengthen those in the region who would argue that we leave our friends isolated and that the U.S. is disinterested in the hemisphere. Since U.S. assistance for Plan Colombia was approved in the Clinton Administration, more than \$5 billion has been provided with bipartisan support that has helped Colombia to strengthen democracy, counter narco-traffickers, and greatly reduce levels of violence. The Colombia FTA must be seen as part of this commitment.

As recent events in the Andean region show, Colombia is fighting a brutal narco-terrorist insurgency by groups such as the FARC, which still holds some 750 kidnap victims, including three U.S. civilian contractors. In a rough neighborhood, Colombia promotes a model of open market democracy that supports fundamental U.S. national interests, but which some in Latin America openly scorn. With U.S. assistance, there has been a dramatic improvement in Colombia's security, with homicides down 40 percent, kidnapping by 83 percent, and terrorist attacks down by 76 percent, since 2002. The government of Colombia has regained control of many areas previously held by illegal armed groups, but much more needs to be done.

In addition, President Uribe has shown great personal courage in placing his government at the front lines of the war against narco-traffickers, who directly threaten the lives of American citizens here at home. Under his leadership, and with substantial assistance from the United States, Colombia has reduced cocaine production, cut opium poppy production by almost three-quarters, and nearly tripled the seizures of cocaine base destined for the U.S. between 2000 and 2005. Overall, there has been improvement in the Colombian government's efforts at interdiction, fighting precursors, and reducing the overall effect of drugs on the economy. Each year, approximately 400 metric tons is eradicated or interdicted by U.S.-Colombia efforts. In a testament to its close bilateral partnership with the United States, Colombia has dramatically increased their extradition of criminals to our country, from less than 100 when President Uribe took office in 2002 to well over 600 now.

We abhor and condemn in the strongest terms the violence against trade unionists, and all human rights abuses that have occurred in Colombia. Some acts of violence against trade unionists are committed by illegal armed groups like FARC. However, while the situation in Colombia is far from perfect, there has been substantial progress on all fronts since President Uribe took office. For example, the number of homicides of trade unionists in Colombia continues to be far lower than the overall homicide rate for the general population. These improvements coincided with a notable downturn in attacks by paramilitaries and the FARC beginning in 2002, underscoring the linkable between levels of violence and human rights abuses in Colombia and the activities of illegal armed groups.

The government of Colombia has created a program that provides special security protection to some 9400 individuals, including 1900 trade unionists. In October 2006, the Prosecutor General's Office created a special labor unit to address priority cases of violence against trade unionists. Another key government initiative is to improve the administration of justice in Colombia to deliver better legal services and address a large backlog of crimes that were never brought to trial. In a separate initiative, President Uribe has led an effort to investigate and prosecute any and all government officials with paramilitary ties.

Defeating the FTA would hardly promote cooperation needed to advance the human rights and anti-violence campaign.

From an economic perspective, this is a "win-win" situation. Our market is already substantially open to Colombia's products, with over 90 percent of Colombian exports entering the United States duty free, while U.S. exports to Colombia face significant barriers, with tariffs up to 35 percent for industrial and consumer goods and much higher tariffs for agricultural products. In 2007, Colombia exported \$9.4 billion to the United States, virtually all of it duty-free as a result of the U.S. trade preference programs, while U.S. exporters shipped \$8.6 billion to Colombia under the handicap of significant Colombian tariffs, which would be removed over time by the FTA. Today Colombia has double-digit tariffs on paper and paper products, transportation equipment, building products and consumer goods. U.S. agricultural exports of over \$1 billion all face a duty there (for example, 15 percent Colombia tariffs on U.S. apples and oranges), while 99.9 percent of Colombia's agricultural exports to the United States were duty-free. The FTA will immediately eliminate tariffs on more than 80 percent of American exports of industrial and consumer goods, and over time, 100 percent, including information technology products, agricultural products, construction equipment, medical equipment, and electrical power generation equipment. This agreement will help our balance of trade.

We see the FTA as an important tool to support Colombia's social and economic development. Already, increased trade has helped Colombia's economy grow with GDP increasing from 1.7 percent in 2002 to 7 percent in 2007, and with poverty being reduced almost 20 percent since 2002. U.S. exports to the 14 nations with whom the United States has an FTA have grown some 40 percent faster than U.S. exports to the rest of the world. There is every reason to believe this will happen with Colombia.

We also hope that Congress will favorably consider reauthorizing and strengthening the Trade Adjustment Assistance program to help workers transition to new jobs.

With the sustained help of the United States and the strong leadership of President Uribe, Colombia has, in the words of a recent report, moved “back from the brink” of being a failed state to being an example of positive transformation in the world. Supporting this agreement will ensure our active role in maintaining stability and security in our hemisphere. Colombia has earned the support and friendship of the United States. To delay passing the U.S.-Colombia FTA this year would send a negative signal to one of our closest allies in Latin America, and would be seized upon by our country’s opponents as a sign of U.S. inconstancy at a critical time.

Bernard Aronson, former Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs

Ambassador Harriet Babbitt, former Permanent Representative to the Organization of American States

The Honorable James Bacchus, former Congressman (Florida) and former chairman, Appellate Body of the World Trade Organization

The Honorable Michael D. Barnes, former Congressman (Maryland) and former chairman, Western Hemisphere Subcommittee, House Foreign Affairs Committee

Rand Beers, former Assistant Secretary of State

The Honorable David Boren, former Senator (Oklahoma) and former Governor (Oklahoma)

The Honorable John Breaux, former Congressman and Senator (Louisiana) and former Senate Majority Whip

The Honorable William S. Cohen, former Congressman and Senator (Maine) and former Secretary of Defense

W. Bowman Cutter, former Assistant to the President for Economic Policy

William Daley, former Secretary of Commerce

John Deutch, former Deputy Secretary of Defense and former Director of Central Intelligence 1995-96

The Honorable Calvin M. “Cal” Dooley, former Congressman (California)

Ambassador Stuart E. Eizenstat, former Chief Domestic Policy Adviser to President Carter and former Deputy Secretary of the Treasury during the Clinton Administration

Ambassador Richard N. Gardner, former Ambassador to Italy and Spain

The Honorable Sam M. Gibbons, former Congressman (Florida) and former chairman, House Ways and Means Committee

The Honorable Dan Glickman, former Congressman (Kansas) and former Secretary of Agriculture

The Honorable Bob Graham, former Governor (Florida) and former Senator (Florida)

Ambassador Marc Grossman, former Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs

The Honorable Lee Hamilton, former Congressman (Indiana) and former chairman, House Committee on Foreign Affairs

John Hamre, former Deputy Secretary of Defense

The Honorable James R. Jones, former Congressman (Oklahoma) and former chairman, House Budget Committee, and former Ambassador to Mexico

The Honorable Bob Kerrey, former Governor (Nebraska) and former Senator (Nebraska)

General Barry R. McCaffrey, former Director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy and former Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Armed Forces Southern Command

Thomas F. "Mack" McLarty, former White House Chief of Staff and former Special Envoy for the Americas

Robert A. Pastor, former Director of Latin American and Caribbean Affairs, National Security Council

Ambassador Thomas R. Pickering, former Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs and former Ambassador (United Nations, El Salvador, India, Israel, Jordan, Nigeria, and Russia)

Ambassador Peter Romero, former Ambassador (Ecuador) and former Assistant Secretary of State

The Honorable Patricia Schroeder, former Congresswoman (Colorado)

The Honorable Donna Shalala, former Secretary of Health and Human Services

Ira Shapiro, former General Counsel and Ambassador, Office of the U.S. Trade Representative

The Honorable Steve Solarz, former Congressman (New York)

Maurice Sonnenberg, former member President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board,
and former Vice Chair, National Commission on Terrorism

Ambassador Alexander F. Watson, former Ambassador (Peru), former Deputy Permanent
U.S. Representative to the United Nations, and former Assistant Secretary of State for
the Western Hemisphere

Frank G. Wisner, former Ambassador (Zambia, Egypt, Philippines, India) and former Under
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