

Mingas

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February 8, 2010

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

Dear President Obama:

The enclosed letter addresses the recently signed military agreement between the governments of Colombia and the United States. This letter was generated by the Mingas Network and has been signed by 96 organizations in the United States and Canada.

The Mingas Network is composed of individuals from across the United States and Canada who are concerned with promoting sovereignty and economic development, strengthening democracy and improving labor conditions in Colombia. We are united in our support for social movements and our rejection of all acts of violence. The Mingas Network is integrated within the Hemispheric Social Alliance and is active in North America.

Your careful consideration of the enclosed letter is much appreciated. We look forward to your response.

Cordially,

Raul Fernandez
Member of Executive Committee
The Mingas Network

CC: The Honorable Hillary R. Clinton
The Honorable Arturo A. Valenzuela

Sen. Christopher Dodd, CT
Sen. Patrick J. Leahy, VT
Sen. Russell D. Feingold, WI
Rep. Raul Grijalva, AZ
Rep. Barbara Lee, CA
Rep. Pete Stark, CA
Rep. Lynn Woolsey, CA
Rep. Bob Filner, CA
Rep. Janice Schakowsky, IL

Rep. Jim McGovern, MA
Rep. Keith Ellison, MN
Rep. James Oberstar, MN
Rep. Rush Holt, NJ
Rep. Jose Serrano, NY
Rep. Dennis Kucinich, OH
Rep. Chaka Fattah, PA
Rep. Tammy Baldwin, WI

President Barack H. Obama
The White House
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Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

On October 30, 2009, the government of Colombian president Álvaro Uribe signed a military agreement that ceded the sovereignty of Colombia's land, sea, and air to the United States, under the pretext of a war on drugs that has been a resounding failure.

The Colombian government pledged to allow U.S. soldiers and contractors to use seven specified military bases as well as any others that "may be necessary to carry out joint operations," thus heightening internal and external tensions in the region. Such a pact strongly contravenes the development of a new kind of relationship between the United States and Latin America. In fact, we ask you to annul the agreement because of the threats it poses to peace, regional stability, and Colombia's sovereignty.

The signatories of this letter repudiate terror and terrorism in all forms, assassinations, kidnappings, and the exercise of violence as an instrument of political action. These acts of violence which have plagued Colombia are not legitimate expressions of popular struggle and impede citizens' and organizations' efforts to build a just society. As supporters of democratic processes in Colombia, we feel certain that a further entrenched presence of the U.S. military in Colombia will only intensify the internal armed conflict, interfere with efforts to find a peaceful solution to that conflict, and weaken rather than strengthen Colombian democracy.

President Obama, at the Summit of the Americas in April 2009 you promised to foster a "new sense of partnership" between the United States and the rest of the Western Hemisphere. But your administration has yet to address the grave concerns expressed by national leaders throughout Central and South America and the Caribbean regarding the U.S.-Colombia military base agreement.

With this agreement, Colombia may have allowed itself to become not just a training ground for U.S. troops but a platform to stage regional military operations. Many thoughtful Colombians fear that their territory will be used to threaten other nations and interfere in democratic processes in the hemisphere. Despite subsequent whitewashing, an Air Force document submitted to Congress in mid-2009 (the Military Construction Program, FY 2010 Budget Estimates, Justification Data Submitted to Congress, May 2009, pp. 215–17) confirmed that the originally envisioned purpose of the bases went far beyond narcotics control. The bases would provide "a unique opportunity for full spectrum operations in a critical sub region of our hemisphere" where "stability" is "under constant threat" by factors such as "anti-US governments" and "endemic poverty." The document explicitly contradicts the avowal that U.S. use of the bases would be limited to narcotics control operations.

Further, the agreement grants immunity to U.S. military personnel, contractors, their family members, and other dependents, so that the Colombian justice system will be prevented from bringing them to trial and convicting them for any crime they may commit in its territory. Around the world, such immunity has been shown to correlate with an unconscionable level of sexual crimes against women and other abuses.

Clearly, then, peace and stability in Colombia and the hemisphere, a new direction for U.S.–Latin American relations, and respect for the national sovereignty of Colombia are ill served by this military bases agreement. We urge you to withdraw it altogether.

Very cordially yours,

Organizations from the U.S.

Across the Americas ♦ Ruth Goring, Codirector ♦ Chicago, IL
 Activist San Diego ♦ Martin Eder, Director ♦ San Diego, CA
 American Friends Service Committee ♦ Oskar Castro, Program Analyst – Peace & Conflict Transformation ♦ Philadelphia, PA
 ASOCOL–Association for the Sovereignty of Colombia ♦ Raul Fernandez, Member, Board of Directors ♦ Irvine, CA
 Beehive Design Collective ♦ Jonathan Luna, Pollinator ♦ Miami, FL
 Bend-Condega Friendship Project ♦ Tim Jeffreis, Coordinator ♦ Bend, OR
 Bike4Peace ♦ Vernon Huffman, Bicyclist ♦ Corvallis, OR
 Brooklyn For Peace – Latin America Committee ♦ Susan Metz, Facilitator ♦ Brooklyn, NY
 Coalition For Alternatives to Militarism In Our Schools ♦ Arlene Inouye, Coordinator ♦ South Pasadena, CA
 Carolina Interfaith Task Force on Central America ♦ Gail Phares, Director ♦ Raleigh, NC
 Center for Peace and Social Justice ♦ Robert Brophy, Co-founder ♦ Los Alamitos, CA
 Chicago Religious Leadership Network on Latin America (CRLN) ♦ Gary Cozette, Program Director ♦ Chicago, IL
 Chicago-Cinquera Sister Cities ♦ Jerry Pendergast, Volunteer ♦ Chicago, IL
 Citizens For Global Solutions, Boulder Chapter ♦ Martha W. D. Bushnell, Leader ♦ Boulder, CO
 Coalition for Justice ♦ Rosemarie Sawdon, Vice Chair ♦ Blacksburg, VA
 Colombia Action/CT ♦ Stephen V. Kobasa, Facilitator ♦ New Haven, CT
 Colombia Peace Project ♦ Patrick Bonner, Coordinator ♦ South Gate, CA
 Colombia Vive ♦ Ana Zambrano, Director ♦ Quincy, MA
 Community Action on Latin America (CALA) ♦ Marc Becker, President ♦ Madison, WI

Copper Country Peace Alliance ♦ Dana Richter, Ph.D., Coordinator ♦ Houghton, MI
 8th Day Center for Justice ♦ Erin Cox, Issue Staff ♦ Chicago, IL
 Fellowship of Reconciliation ♦ Mark Johnson, Executive Director ♦ Nyack, NY
 First Church of the Brethren ♦ Orlando Redekopp, Pastor ♦ Chicago, IL
 Global Network ♦ Bruce Gagnon, Coordinator ♦ Brunswick, ME
 Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters, JPIC, USA ♦ Sr. Rose Therese Nolta, Justice and
 Peace Coordinator ♦ Northfield, IL
 Hughes United Methodist Church ♦ Bob and Melba Piersma, Layleaders ♦ Silver
 Spring, MD
 ImaginAction ♦ Hector Aristizábal, Founder/Director ♦ Sierra Madre, CA
 Interfaith Council for Peace & Justice ♦ Mary Anne Perrone, Member, Latin America
 Task Force ♦ Ann Arbor, MI
 Interfaith Peace Ministry of Orange County ♦ Fred Bush, Chair ♦ Newport Coast, CA
 Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Task Force of the Presbytery of San Fernando
 ♦ Lisa Patriquin, Chair ♦ Tarzana, CA
 Latin American Solidarity Committee of the Western New York Peace Center ♦
 Wayne Alt, Coordinator ♦ Buffalo, NY
 Leadership Team of Sisters of the Most Precious Blood ♦ Sr. Carol Boschert, Council
 Contact ♦ O'Fallon, MO
 Let Cuba Live of Maine ♦ William Whitney Jr., Delegate ♦ Brunswick, ME
 Linn-Benton Chapter of the Pacific Green Party ♦ Mike Beilstein, Steering
 Committee ♦ Corvallis, OR
 New Jersey Labor Against War ♦ Carol Gay, Chairperson ♦ Brick, NJ
 New Mexico Interfaith Coalition for Refugee Rights ♦ Renny Golden ♦ Albuquerque,
 NM
 No More Victims ♦ Cole Miller, Founding Director ♦ Los Angeles, CA
 Nonviolence International ♦ Andres Conteris, Director of Program of the Americas ♦
 Washington, DC
 Northeast Philly for Peace and Justice ♦ Evelyn Haas, Member of Executive
 Committee ♦ Philadelphia, PA
 Office of the Americas ♦ Blase Bonpane, Ph.D., Director ♦ Los Angeles, CA
 Our Developing World ♦ Vic and Barby Ulmer, Codirectors ♦ Saratoga, CA
 Pax Christi Clinton, Iowa ♦ Dr. Art Donart, Member-Coordinator ♦ Thomson, IL
 Pax Christi Greensburg, PA ♦ Fr. Bernard Survil, Coordinator ♦ Greensburg, PA
 Pax Christi Southeastern SD ♦ Leona Wieland, Co-chair ♦ Sioux Falls, SD
 Peace Farm ♦ Cletus Stein, President ♦ Amarillo, TX
 Peace Is Patriotic ♦ Jerry Sobieraj, Co-director ♦ Boston, MA
 PeaceWorks ♦ Selma Sternlieb, Coordinator ♦ Brunswick, ME

Poima, A Presbyterian Community ♦ Barbara McCarty, Commissioned Lay Pastor ♦ Manor, TX

Polo Democrático Alternativo–NY ♦ Carlos Salamanca, Coordinator ♦ Brooklyn, NY

Praxis Institute for Social Justice ♦ Kimberly Theidon, Executive Director ♦ Medford, MA

Presbyterian Peace Fellowship ♦ Rick Ufford-Chase, Executive Director ♦ Stony Point, NY

Quixote Center ♦ Thomas Loudon, Codirector ♦ Brentwood, MD

Rock River Peace Group ♦ Charles Ogg, President ♦ Milton, WI

Rogue Valley Veterans for Peace, Chapter 156 ♦ Hal Anthony, President ♦ Grants Pass, OR

School of the Americas Watch ♦ Pamela Bowman, Legislative and Research Coordinator ♦ Washington, DC

School of the Americas Watch, Los Angeles Chapter ♦ Robert Lujan, Co-founding Member ♦ San Gabriel, CA

SEIU-Local 32BJ ♦ Saul Nieves, Organizer ♦ Brooklyn, NY

Sisters of Saint Francis – School of Americas/Columbia Working Group ♦ Sr. Betty Kenny, OSF, Chair ♦ West St. Paul, MN

Spa del Sol LLC ♦ Joette Peterson, Manager ♦ Madison, WI

St. Mark Presbyterian Peace and Justice Commission ♦ Jeannen Whitesell, Member of the Board ♦ Newport Beach, CA

Sustainable Michigan ♦ Kris Kaul Ann, Organizer ♦ Arbor, MI

Syracuse/Cajibío, Colombia Sister Community ♦ Ann Tiffany, Coordinator ♦ Syracuse, NY

The Madison Arcatao Sister City Project ♦ Barbara Alvarado, Board Co-president ♦ Madison, WI

The Other Americas Radio ♦ Eric Schwartz, Executive Producer ♦ Santa Barbara, CA

Topanga Peace Alliance ♦ Julie Levine, Director ♦ Topanga, CA

Trade Justice New York Metro ♦ Leonard Morin, Organizer ♦ New York, NY

Trade Unionists in Solidarity with Colombia (TUSC) ♦ Gustavo Mejias ♦ Jamaica, NY

Trade Unionists Solidarity Committee with Colombia ♦ German Ahumada, Coordinator ♦ New York, NY

Upside Down World Online Magazine ♦ Benjamin Dangl, Editor/Founder ♦ Burlington, VT

Veterans for Peace–Chapter 27 ♦ Dave Logsdon, Vice-President ♦ Minneapolis, MN

Witness for Peace ♦ Sharon Hostetler, Executive Director ♦ Washington, DC

Witness for Peace Southwest ♦ Tanya Cole Regional, Organizer ♦ Northridge, CA

Women Against Military Madness ♦ Carol Masters, Chair, Board of Directors ♦ Minneapolis, MN

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, US Section ♦ Nancy Munger,
Co-president ♦ Boston, MA

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Cape Cod Branch ♦ Elenita
Muñiz, Convenor ♦ Brewster, MA

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Madison Branch ♦ Mary
Sanderson, President ♦ De Forest, WI

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Portland Branch ♦ Georgia
Pinkel, Convenor ♦ Vancouver, WA

World Without Borders Interfaith Sufi Ashram ♦ John Ishvaradas Abdallah,
Executive Director ♦ San Pedro, CA

Organizations from Canada

Base of Peace Montréal ♦ Silvio Villegas, Comité Comunicaciones ♦ Montréal, QC
Burstthebubble.org ♦ Chad Riopel, Chair ♦ Guelph, ON

Canadian Union of Postal Workers ♦ Joanne Miller, Shop Steward ♦ Calgary, AB
Canadians for Action on Climate Change ♦ Cory Morningstar, Chair ♦ London, ON
Conseil Central du Montréal Métropolitain (CSN) ♦ Dominique Daigneault,
Secrétaire Générale ♦ Montréal, QC

Council of Canadians, London Chapter ♦ Cory Morningstar, Chair ♦ London, ON

Council of Canadians, Toronto Chapter ♦ John Barber, Member ♦ Toronto, ON

Food Not Bombs ♦ Ben Amundson, Coordinator ♦ Vancouver, BC

Hemispheric Social Alliance ♦ Emmanuel Rozental, Secretariat Advisory Team ♦
Toronto, ON

Justice For All ♦ Teri Strain, Group Leader ♦ Peterborough, ON

La Chiva Collective ♦ Micheál Ó Tuathail, Member ♦ Vancouver, BC

Latin American Canadian Solidarity Association ♦ David Heap, Spokesperson ♦
London, ON

Medicine Hat & District Labour Council ♦ David Condon, President ♦ Medicine Hat,
AB

National Council of Latin American Women in Canada ♦ Nchamah Miller, President
♦ Thornhill, ON

Niagara Secular Humanists ♦ Horst Klaus, President ♦ St. Catharines, ON

Peace & Global Educators PSA of British Columbia ♦ Susan Ruzic, President ♦
Vancouver, BC

Red Latinoamericana de Investigadores por la Paz ♦ Nchamah Miller, Director,
International Relations ♦ Thornhill, ON

Science for Peace ♦ Judith Deutsch, President ♦ Toronto, ON

St. Catharines & District Labour Council ♦ Bruce Allen, President ♦ St. Catharines,
ON