

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

July 31, 2024

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear President Biden and Secretary Blinken,

Thank you for voting in favor of a United Nations Security Council resolution supporting Colombia's "Total Peace" plan in late January. We are writing to urge you to strengthen your support for implementation of the 2016 peace accord and for the Colombian government's dialogues with the National Liberation Army (ELN) and the Second Marquetalia, and the Estado Mayor Central (EMC). Specifically, we ask that you appoint a U.S. special envoy to the peace talks and reverse the Trump Administration's decision to designate Cuba as a state sponsor of terrorism (SSOT) in order to advance peace efforts.

For over five decades, Colombia has been embroiled in a violent internal armed conflict. This has deeply scarred Colombian society, disproportionately affecting Afro-Colombian and Indigenous communities, women, children and rural persons. According to the Colombian government's registry of victims, the conflict has resulted in more than 9.6 million victims, including over 800,000 people killed¹ and over 8.6 million people internally displaced.²

In February 2015, President Barack Obama appointed Bernie Aronson as U.S. Special Envoy to the Colombian Peace Process.³ The U.S.'s explicit support for Colombia's peace process was instrumental in pushing the negotiations forward and facilitating the integration of key U.S. priorities into the final accord.⁴ We played an important role in guaranteeing the integration of ethnic peoples' rights and victims' rights into this agreement. This backing helped achieve a historic peace agreement with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia — FARC), the country's largest insurgent group, in November 2016. While this achieved only partial peace, the FARC peace agreement still holds and is considered one of the most sophisticated agreements worldwide. The majority of the over 13,000 FARC combatants who turned in their weapons remain committed to civilian life.⁵ Colombia's groundbreaking transitional justice system is helping to bring truth, justice, and reparations to victims and those most responsible for atrocities to justice.

As the head of the UN Verification Mission in Colombia, Carlos Ruiz Massieu notes Colombia is "a global success story" and a model for countries to forge peace through dialogue.⁶ However, there is still a long way to

¹ "Cifras de la Comisión de la Verdad presentadas junto con el Informe Final," Comisión de la Verdad, July 11, 2022, <https://web.comisiondelaverdad.co/actualidad/noticias/principales-cifras-comision-de-la-verdad-informe-final/>.

² "En Colombia aún hay 6,9 millones de desplazados que necesitan asistencia o reparación," *EFE Noticias*, April 26, 2024, <https://efe.com/mundo/2024-04-26/en-colombia-aun-hay-69-millones-de-desplazados>.

³ Office of the Press Secretary, "FACT SHEET: Peace Colombia -- A New Era of Partnership between the United States and Colombia," White House Archives, February 4, 2016, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/02/04/fact-sheet-peace-colombia-new-era-partnership-between-united-states-and>.

⁴ Segura, Renata and Delphine Mechoulan, "Made in Havana: How Colombia and the FARC Decided to End the War," International Peace Institute, February 2017, <https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/IPI-Rpt-Made-in-Havana.pdf>.

⁵ "Más del 95% de exguerrilleros de las FARC que se desmovilizaron continúan acogidos a los acuerdos de paz, dice la ONU," *CNN Español*, January 12, 2022, <https://cnnespanol.cnn.com/2022/01/12/exguerrilleros-desmovilizaron-continuan-acogidos-al-acuerdo-paz-colombia-onu-orix/>.

⁶ "Colombia serves as 'a model' for countries using dialogue to forge peace," *UN News*, April 9, 2024, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/04/1148396>.

go to achieve peace in Colombia — illegal armed actors continue to engage in human rights violations, and parts of the country remain under their control. President Gustavo Petro has attempted to address the continued violence by strengthening Colombia’s commitment to the peace process through his “Total Peace” plan.

While talks with parts of the EMC have stalled, negotiations with the Second Marquetalia are underway and recently reached a significant milestone when the guerrilla group agreed to a "unilateral ceasefire" and to releasing a number of captives.⁷ Negotiations remain complex but have advanced further under President Petro than during attempts under the previous six administrations. However, the “Total Peace” plan is at a critical juncture, facing strong criticism in Colombia and abroad for its slow progress amid ongoing violence in certain regions.

Your Administration has an opportunity to help achieve a lasting peace in Colombia through the appointment of a new special envoy. The appointment of a special envoy will signal the U.S.'s continued commitment to the peace process in Colombia and provide the “Total Peace” plan with renewed momentum. The success of this plan will largely depend on the government’s ability to strike peace agreements with the many groups that continue to wage war and commit human rights violations.

The success of the peace process also relies on other countries willing to serve as guarantors of the peace talks. We are concerned that the Trump Administration’s decision to designate Cuba as a state sponsor of terrorism (SSOT) could make it harder to identify those countries and urge you to reverse this designation. Your predecessor's decision was reportedly influenced by Cuba's refusal to extradite 10 members of the ELN who had been involved in peace negotiations with the Colombian government.⁸ As a guarantor of the talks, Cuba was adhering to its commitments under international protocols, a stance fully supported by another guarantor country, Norway. The Colombian government has since withdrawn the extradition request and has repeatedly called for Cuba's removal from the SSOT list, recognizing Cuba's essential role as a host and guarantor of the peace talks.⁹

The U.S. has a vested interest in ensuring Colombia's peace process is successful. Colombia is a historical and vital partner. Both our countries are jointly addressing the U.S. priority interests of narcotrafficking, corruption, and migration. Colombia is host to nearly 3 million Venezuelan refugees and migrants and the transit country for others seeking safety.¹⁰ Achieving a more secure Colombia where more illegal armed groups demobilize makes the country a more sustainable home for Venezuelans. Parallel to this, if the “Total Peace” effort were to collapse, violence and internal displacement would make U.S. interests harder to achieve in the country.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We stand ready to work with you to forge a path to peace and stability in Colombia and across the region.

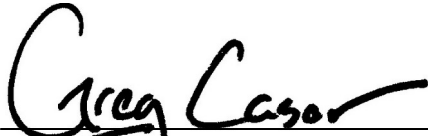
Sincerely,

⁷ “Colombia rebel group agrees to 'unilateral ceasefire,’” *Yahoo News*, June 30, 2024, <https://sg.news.yahoo.com/colombia-rebel-group-agrees-unilateral-060335479.html>.

⁸ Nodarse Venancio, Mariakarla and Alex Bare, “The Human Cost of Cuba’s Inclusion on the State Sponsor of Terrorism List,” Washington Office on Latin America, March 28, 2023, <https://www.wola.org/analysis/human-cost-cuba-state-sponsor-of-terrorism-list/>.

⁹ “Colombia suspends ELN rebel arrest warrants, extradition orders to restart peace talks,” *Reuters*, August 20, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/colombia-suspends-eln-rebel-arrest-warrants-extradition-orders-restart-peace-2022-08-20/>.

¹⁰ “Colombia’s Refugee Crisis and Integration Approach Explained,” USA for UNHCR, April 18, 2024, <https://www.unrefugees.org/news/colombia-s-refugee-crisis-and-integration-approach-explained/>.



Greg Casar
Member of Congress



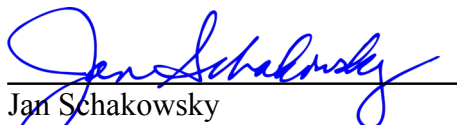
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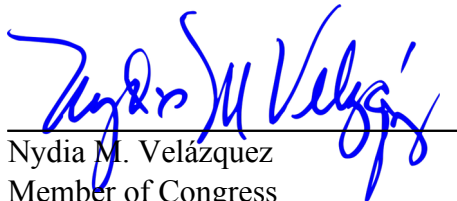
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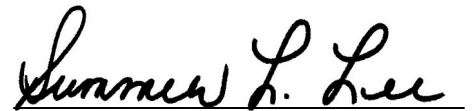
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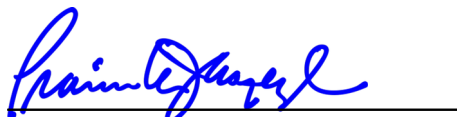
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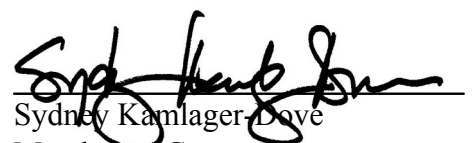
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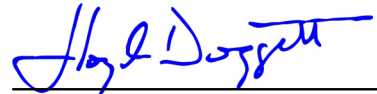
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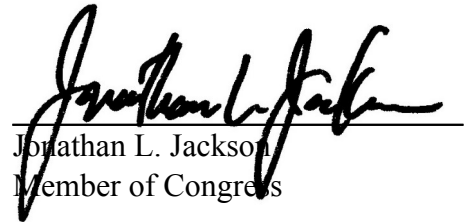
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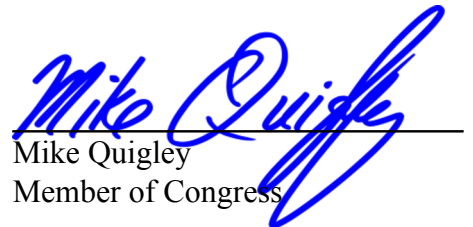
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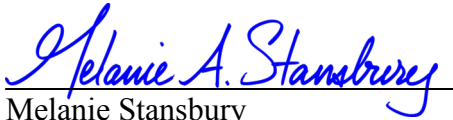
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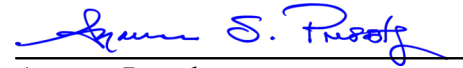
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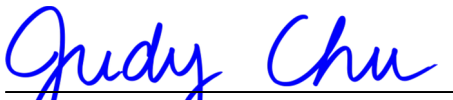
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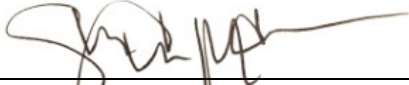
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