

Writing to Congress

Writing to Congress is an effective way to voice your opinion on U.S. aid to Colombia. You can write your own letters as well as organize a letter-writing campaign by having letter writing materials available for people after a group meeting, union local meeting, class, or worship service. Congressional staff members say it only takes 10-20 letters to draw their attention to an issue.

Letter Writing Tips:

1. Use the proper title: Honorable or Representative/Senator.
2. Be brief and courteous. Many effective letters are only 4-5 sentences long.
3. Most congressional offices respond to hand-written letters with information on their positions on the issue, so it helps if you first check out your representatives voting record (included with this kit).
4. Be specific. Reference the foreign aid appropriations bill for FY 2005 so they know specifically what you are talking about as well as what you want your member of Congress to do.
5. Put a return address on the letter and the envelope. This way the congressional offices can confirm that you are indeed a constituent/voter and they can respond to you with a letter.

Sample Letters:

Make sure to check how your House representative voted on the last amendment to cut military aid to Colombia, and write your letter accordingly. Below we've included a sample letter for Senators and two sample letters to House representatives, one for those who have already voted in favor of cuts in military aid to Colombia and one for those who have not.

1. Sample letter to House Representatives who have voted in favor of cutting military aid to Colombia:

The Honorable _____
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington DC 20515

Dear Representative _____:

Thank you for supporting the McGovern-Skelton-DeLauro amendment to the FY 2004 foreign aid appropriations bill in July 2003 that would have decreased military aid to Colombia.

When the FY 2005 foreign aid appropriations bill comes to the floor this year, I urge you to again support any amendment that cuts military aid to Colombia. Colombia continues to be the most dangerous place in the world to be a trade unionist. In 2003, more trade unionists were killed in Colombia than the rest of the world combined. While guerrillas are responsible for some of these killings, paramilitary forces, with links to the Colombian government, are responsible for the majority of these murders. And impunity reigns. Virtually no one has been prosecuted for these assassinations. The U.S. should not continue to support a military that violates human rights and collaborates with paramilitaries.

U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia needs to be more balanced. Instead of heavily funding the Colombian military, the U.S. should support the strengthening of civil society, the judicial system, social and economic programs, and also push to end impunity.

Again, I thank you for your support of Colombian workers and I look forward to working with you to promote a more balanced U.S. policy in Colombia.

Sincerely,
Name & Address

2. Sample letter to House members who have not voted in favor of cuts in Colombian military aid:

The Honorable _____
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington DC 20515

Dear Representative _____:

When the FY 2005 foreign aid appropriations bill comes to the floor this year, I urge you to support any amendment that cuts military aid to Colombia. Colombia continues to be the most dangerous place in the world to be a trade unionist. In 2003, more trade unionists were killed in Colombia than the rest of the world combined. While guerrillas are responsible for some of these killings, paramilitary forces, with links to the Colombian government, are responsible for the majority of these murders. And impunity reigns. Virtually no one has been prosecuted for these assassinations. The U.S. should not continue to support a military that violates human rights and collaborates with paramilitaries.

U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia needs to be more balanced. Instead of heavily funding the Colombian military, the U.S. should support the strengthening of civil society, the judicial system, social and economic programs, and also push to end impunity.

Again, I thank you for your support of Colombian workers and I look forward to working with you to promote a more balanced U.S. policy in Colombia.

Sincerely,
Name & Address

3. Sample letter to Senators:

Senator _____
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator _____:

I write to you at this time to urge you to support any resolution, sign-on letter, or amendments to the foreign aid appropriations bill that supports a reduction in military aid to Colombia. I am aware that there has been little action in the Senate to change U.S. policy towards Colombia since Plan Colombia was passed in 2000. I believe that there is a great need for the U.S. to re-examine its policy towards Colombia as the violence there escalates. There are many concerns about U.S. policy in Colombia, but I would like to specifically address those effecting Colombian workers.

Colombia continues to be the most dangerous place in the world to be a trade unionist. In 2003, more trade unionists were killed in Colombia than the rest of the world combined. While guerrillas are responsible for some of these killings, paramilitary forces, with links to the Colombian government, are responsible for the majority of these murders. And impunity reigns. Virtually no one has been prosecuted for these assassinations. The U.S. should not continue to support a military that violates human rights and collaborates with paramilitaries.

Despite the Senate's good intentions of making aid contingent on human rights conditions, there has been little progress in Colombia. Democracy has been weakened under President Uribe, human rights violations have increased, and illegal drug cultivation has remained rampant. Trade unionists continue to be targeted for their normal union activities and the Colombian government has essentially let these killings go unpunished (there have only been a handful of guilty verdicts for the 4000 trade unionists murdered in Colombia since the mid-1980s).

U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia needs to be more balanced. Instead of heavily funding the Colombian military, the U.S. should support the strengthening of civil society, the judicial system, social and economic programs, and also push to end impunity.

I encourage you to challenge the current U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia.

Sincerely,