



Committee on International Justice and Peace

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September 30, 2011

The Honorable Hillary Clinton
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Clinton:

As Chairman of the Committee on International Justice and Peace of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), I write to share the concerns of my fellow bishops in Colombia regarding criminal activity that continues to be directed in that country against members and officials of the Catholic Church, as well as human rights activists.

On September 12, a priest was murdered in the town of Capurgana, bringing to a total of six the number of priests murdered in Colombia during the course of this year alone. The history of violence directed at Church officials in Colombia is extensive. Over seventy priests, two bishops, eight religious and three seminarians have been killed in that country since 1984. Attached please find the Spanish original version, as well as an unofficial English translation, of a statement of the Colombian Bishops' Conference. In this document, the bishops condemn these acts of violence.

We appreciate the statements that the U.S. Government has made concerning the continuing violence in Colombia, including the State Department's "Determination and Certification of the Colombian Government with Respect to Human Rights Related Conditions," provided to the U.S. Congress on September 7, 2011. We fully endorse the Department's conclusion in this context that "[m]ore remains to be done. Threats and attacks against human rights defenders continue to be a significant problem, as the Colombian government acknowledges."

We agree, as well, with the United States Government that important steps have been taken by the Colombian Government to improve respect for human rights. These are detailed in the above-described Declaration and Certification. They include passage of a new Land and Victims' Law, issuance of a new Military Penal Code, the appointment of a new Prosecutor General, as well as the strengthening of efforts to dismantle illegal armed groups.

On behalf of the Committee on International Justice and Peace of the USCCB, we ask the U.S. Government to promote vigorously the principles set forth in the Determination and Certification noted above. Please urge the Colombian Government to bring to justice the perpetrators of those crimes committed against Church ministers and human rights activists.

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As a major international presence in the region and a beneficiary of expanding trade with Colombia, our nation has a special moral responsibility to help protect the lives, dignity and future of all our Colombian brothers and sisters. This will be accomplished by assuring the safety, in particular, of the Church's ministers and workers, as well as that of human rights advocates, who are in the forefront of service to the Colombian people.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Howard J. Hubbard". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "H".

Most Reverend Howard J. Hubbard
Bishop of Albany
Chair, Committee on International Justice and Peace

Enclosure: Statement of the Colombian Bishops' Conference (Spanish original and unofficial English translation)