

August 17, 2011

Honorable Member of Congress:

First, we want to thank you for your service to our country and its citizens, and indeed to your service to people everywhere who continue to look to the United States as a beacon of hope, justice, and freedom.

We write to you from Barranquilla, Colombia, where we live and serve as Mission Co-Workers with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and our partner church here, the *Iglesia Presbiteriana de Colombia*. We want to share with you some of our observations from living and working here amongst a Presbyterian church that seeks to follow God's call to serve the good of all people, especially those far from the centers of power.

We are writing to urge you to vote against the passage of the Colombia Free Trade Agreement as it is currently written. Our churches, here in Colombia and in the United States, have long worked for trade between countries that serves the good of all people, rather than only a select few. The proposed Colombia Free Trade Agreement, as it is currently written, falls short of the basic principle of fairness for all, and thus as a church we cannot support its passage.

There are many reasons for this agreement's shortcomings: the destructive effects on the Colombian environment, the weak protections for Colombia's threatened indigenous peoples and Afro-descendent population, and the threats and violence against Colombian trade unionists. Conversely, there are other negative impacts for US workers and manufacturing. These weaknesses in the current agreement have been well covered by other groups.

We want to focus, however, on the destructive effects that this agreement will have on the average Colombian small-scale farmer and how that will have negative consequences for the well-being of US citizens in your district. Small-scale farmers in Colombia make up the majority of the rural population, most existing at a subsistence level or just a step above. They usually farm small plots of land, often with few legal guarantees, harvesting staple crops such as corn, rice, sugar, and other native consumables. Their existence is precarious, depending greatly on market prices, weather, and other forces of nature, to say nothing of the myriad of violence and social conflicts that are particular to the Colombian context.

The introduction of US agricultural staples such as corn, rice and sugar, which are all subsidized and produced at much lower costs in the United States than is possible in Colombia will have a highly detrimental effect on the majority of rural Colombians, effectively eliminating the livelihoods of many of these farmers. For that reason alone, this trade agreement is flawed. There are, however, much deeper implications to this drastic reduction of the Colombian rural economy.

For years, the United States has worked to decrease the amount of coca that is grown in Colombia, mostly through the aid package of Plan Colombia. Particularly through the social aid in the package, which Congress has emphasized in recent years, the US government, through USAID, has striven to reduce the incentives to small scale farmers

for growing coca. We have learned that the only effective programs to reduce coca is by offering small scale farmers other viable options to provide for their families. Through smart and targeted programs we are finally seeing results, and the amount of coca being grown in recent years has begun to decline. These gains are tentative, and the wide-scale introduction of US subsidized crops will obliterate them since the destruction of the rural economy here will effectively make the illicit coca trade the only viable alternative to thousands of small Colombian farmers. We will have worked for the past ten years only to reverse course overnight.

Many members of our partner church are these small scale farmers. In our time living with and working among them, we know that they are not the ones who will turn to growing coca to provide for their families. But we also know that given that choice – to grow coca and feed your family, or watch them perish – thousands of other campesinos will turn to coca.

That coca will bring with it many tremendous negative consequences as it travels to the United States. We are seeing the impacts on cocaine's trafficking in South and Central America. We know its impacts on the streets of the United States. Those consequences touch all of us through addiction, violence, and the destruction wrought by the drug trade. There are many parts to the drug problem, but it starts with a small, poor farmer deciding how to feed his family here in Colombia. We have a chance to change that decision.

We urge you to consider these implications in your deliberations. We understand fully that trade agreements are complex instruments, with many benefits and costs. That is only amplified in Washington's current climate surrounding these trade deals. **However, the high costs to the rural Colombians we know and work with form the moral case against this particular agreement; and the significant setback to US interests in working against the spread of the coca trade form the logical case against the agreement.** We pray that together, you will find them compelling reasons to vote no to the Colombia Free Trade Agreement.

Blessings,

Rev. Richard Williams and Rev. Mamie Broadhurst
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