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COLOMBIA: PEACE WITH THE FARC?

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BEFORE THE

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THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE

OF THE

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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COLOMBIA: PEACE WITH THE FARC?

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 24, 2015

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 3 o'clock p.m., in room 2172, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Jeff Duncan (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. DUNCAN. A quorum being present, the subcommittee will come to order.

And I would now like to recognize myself for an opening statement. Colombia and the United States have been fierce friends and allies for a very long time, and I believe that Colombia is critical to regional security in the Western Hemisphere. The leadership demonstrated by President Santos and former President Uribe have helped to shape Colombia into a model for the region. Today, Colombia stands as a strong democracy, economic and financial powerhouse, and a leader in training other countries' police and military forces in the region.

We have a free trade agreement with Colombia that shows every sign of benefiting both countries, and Colombia has been a leader in creating the Pacific Alliance to further the economies of the free trade trading bloc of countries in the hemisphere. In particular, the South Carolina National Guard and Colombian military have been working together since 2012 in the State Partnership Program to develop ties and partner capacity and build regional stability.

However, even though Colombia is a leader in the region in so many ways, it is also home to the hemisphere's longest running and only active armed conflict that has claimed over 220,000 lives and displaced more than 5 million people. Let me repeat that: It has claimed over 220,000 lives and displaced more than 5 million people.

According to a recent United Nations report, Colombia has the world's second highest rate of internal refugees after Syria. We all want to see these problems resolved and peace achieved. Today, we meet to examine the issue of peace talks between the Colombian Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC, which have been ongoing since 2012 after three previous failed attempts in 1984, 1991, and 1998. We want to better understand recent developments in the peace talks, examine what elements should be included in a successful agreement, and determine

what a good end state to the conflict would look like for the United States, Colombia, and regional interests.

After nearly 50 years of war, the Colombian people have a vital interest in pursuing peace. Similarly, the American people have given almost $10 billion to help Colombia achieve the end of this conflict, combat drug trafficking, and promote internal development through Plan Colombia. Colombia is the single largest recipient of U.S. foreign assistance in Latin America and the Caribbean, and we have many deep security, economic, and political ties that bind us together.

After 2½ years of negotiations and over 30 rounds of talks, the Colombian Government and the FARC have reached partial agreements on three of five critical points: Land reform, political participation, and drug trafficking. Yet the thorniest of issues—victims' reparations and disarmament and traditional justice and how the final agreement will be approved, verified, implemented, and paid for—remain unresolved.

Given the joint efforts by the United States and Colombians to gain peace, it is critical that whatever outcome Colombia and FARC achieve through the peace process results in peace, justice for crimes committed, and a demobilized FARC that renounces violence, criminal activities, and terrorism in Colombia and neighboring countries, and the FARC's reintegration into Colombia's society through solely peaceful, democratic means.

We must not forget who we are dealing with here. The FARC was founded in 1964 as a Communist guerrilla movement and the military wing of the Colombian Communist Party. Its strategy has been shaped by communism and socialism, and it is a terrorist organization, recognized as such by the United States, Canada, New Zealand, and the European Union. Through its illicit activities, the FARC makes $600 million or more a year and is the third richest terrorist organization after ISIS and Hamas.

It also maintains relations with human rights abusers in the governments of Venezuela, Ecuador, and Cuba; terrorist organizations like Hezbollah; and criminal organizations involved if the drug trade. Lest we forget, although Cuba has been harboring FARC terrorists who have taken refuge in Havana, the Obama administration dropped Cuba's terrorist designation earlier this year. That should not happen with FARC unless we see demonstrable evidence of change and a complete stop of FARC's terrorist attacks in Colombia.

Given this history, we should not forget the advice of Chinese military theorist Sun Tzu, to know the enemy and know yourself, as we pursue options for peace. Why is the FARC at the negotiating table? If the FARC is truly serious about ending the conflict, what is motivating it to carry out more than 150 attacks in the last month, with numbers that have not been seen in Colombia since 2011? I support the pursuit of peace, and peace is always desirable to war. However, it must be clear that any peace agreement reinforces the gains of the last 15 years. If this peace deal is not a good deal and ends up throwing away many of the achievements the U.S. and Colombians have fought for, we may all have a greater problem on our hands.

The U.S. has helped Colombia with the reintegration of former guerrillas. And when I was in Cartagena last year with the full committee chairman, Chairman Royce, we had a meeting with former National Liberation Army, ELN, guerrillas who were discovering the dignity and hope that comes from the entrepreneurial spirit rather than from a life of terrorism. There is a lot of potential when guerrillas lay down their arms and seek to reintegrate back into society peacefully.

I just hope that President Santos does not sacrifice the integrity of his military and Colombia's rich democracy to accomplish the lofty goals of reaching an agreement without demanding changes from the FARC. Let's not make the same mistake in Colombia that we seem to be making with the Iranian nuclear talks. We must make sure that the Colombian peace deal is a good deal.

So, in particular, I am concerned that the preliminary drug-trafficking agreement would roll back efforts gained in Plan Colombia to eliminate the cultivation of coca through aerial spraying. This is problematic because these efforts have been working. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, coca fields in Colombia have fallen from more than 345,000 acres in 2001 to about 118,000 acres by the end of 2013, yet in the partial agreement, only manual eradication is permitted. I have seen manual eradication firsthand in Peru. I know what it entails. And I know how difficult it is. The Colombian Government also has to negotiate eradication with local communities by providing a series of welfare benefits. Such actions could delay eradication and allow the FARC to continue its coca source of income.

This announcement last month that Colombia had decided to completely stop aerial fumigation of drug crops, a centerpiece in U.S. and Colombia efforts to counter the cocaine production, threatens to undo much of the work our countries have done on this issue. In addition, the FARC has requested the United States release Ricardo Palmera, a FARC leader, extradited to the United States in 2004, currently serving a 60-year sentence for his role in a FARC kidnapping and hostage situation involving three Americans.

Similarly, there were at least 60 FARC members who have U.S. indictments against them from the U.S. Department of Justice. While the FARC leadership has made it clear that they will not agree to demobilize unless they will not be extradited to the United States, it is important for the rule of law that criminals face justice for their crimes. There are two cases in particular that deserve review. The United States has requested the extradition of FARC leaders Rodrigo Perez Alzate and Eduardo Cabrera, El Cura is his name, for drug trafficking.

As of March, Colombia has decided not to extradite these individuals to the United States to face justice. I strongly urge Colombia to reconsider. I strongly urge the Obama administration to maintain a firm focus on upholding the rule of law.

So, in conclusion, my message for our Colombian friends is this: We stand with you in your pursuit of peace, but do not give up the military successes we have achieved together at the negotiating table. Colombia's history is full of attempted peace settlements that set up the next war. Let's make sure that this time is different,

that we do not repeat the same mistakes of the past. And let me just say this: I love Colombia. I love the Colombian people. I want peace for Colombia. And I hope that there is success at the negotiating table with the FARC. Peace is desired I think by everyone here for the Colombian people. It is alarming that 220,000 people have died and 5 million people have been displaced. It is time for peace in Colombia.

And so I look forward to a robust discussion about this issue. Americans are concerned about peace in Colombia as well. So, with that, I look forward to hearing from our witnesses.

And I now turn to Ranking Member Sires for his opening statement.

Mr. SIRES. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you to Special Envoy Aronson and Deputy Assistant Secretary Lee for testifying here today.

We are here to examine the ongoing peace talks between Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia. In the 1960s, leftist groups inspired by the Cuban revolution accused the Colombian Government of rural neglect that resulted in poverty and highly concentrated land ownership. The ensuing internal civil conflict between violent leftist guerrilla groups and the government has continued unabated for half a century.

Colombia has been a source country for both cocaine and heroin for more than four decades. Drug trafficking has helped perpetuate Colombia's internal conflict by funding both leftwing and rightwing armed groups. Tens of thousands of Colombians have died in the conflict, and the government has registered more than 25,000 as missing or disappeared.

An originally published U.N. report indicates that nearly 6 million people have been internally displaced in Colombia, the largest displacement in the world after Syria. This displacement has generated a humanitarian crisis which has disproportionately affected women, Afro-Colombians, and indigenous populations. In addition, the use of landmines laid primarily by the FARC has caused more than 10,000 deaths and injuries since 1990.

Through close security cooperation and Plan Colombia, the U.S. gave nearly $10 billion to Colombia over the last 15 years, preventing Colombia from spiralling into a failed narcotrafficking state. With our help, Colombia has succeeded in reestablishing government control over much of its territory, reducing poverty and homicide rates, and making significant progress in combating drug trafficking.

After 50 years of conflict in Colombia and $10 billion in U.S. investments, the FARC and Colombian Government are sitting down for another attempt at finding peace. A comprehensive peace deal is necessary to help Colombia move past this chapter in history and continue the progress they have steadily gained in the past. Two-and-a-half years and 37 rounds of negotiations have led to accords on three of the six main points. Additionally, the FARC has agreed to work with the international community to remove landmines littered throughout Colombia. Rural development, FARC's political participation, and drug trafficking have been resolved.

But the controversial issues of victims' reparations, disarmament, and reintegration of FARC rebels into civilian society re-

mains on the table. A swift and credible resolution to these outstanding issues is critical to ensuring the peace process remains credible in the eyes of the Colombian people. I am interested in hearing how the U.S. can play a productive role in the peace process without playing into the narrative that the U.S. is inserting its own agenda in Colombia.

The Colombian people will only accept an agreement that respects their sovereignty and strikes a balance between retribution and reconciliation. After supporting the Colombian people for decades as they struggle with the internal armed conflict, it is imperative that we continue to support them as they work toward peace.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on how the peace process will move forward. Thank you.

Mr. DUNCAN. I thank the ranking member.

And now recognize the chairwoman of the Middle East and North Africa Subcommittee for an opening statement.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you much so much, Chairman Duncan and Ranking Member Sires.

When discussing the ongoing peace talks between the Colombian Government and the U.S.-designated terrorist group FARC, it is vital that we examine all the ramifications. And the first problem is where these talks are being held, in Cuba, under the auspices of the Castro regime, where repression is the order of the day.

But it isn't just the Castro brothers, who have known sympathies for terrorists and a proclivity for undermining U.S. interests whenever and wherever possible, who have been acting as interlocutors. Maduro in Venezuela and Chavez before him have also been doing this. The Castro brothers, Maduro, and Chavez when he was alive, cannot be trusted, cannot be seen as neutral interlocutors because they all benefited greatly from their relationship with the terrorist group FARC through financing by the drug trade. The materials captured from the 2008 raid of a FARC camp in Ecuador confirmed the cooperation between Venezuelan officials and FARC members. And now Castro has used a charade of these FARC talks to give the Obama administration the cover it needed to remove Cuba from the state sponsor of terrorism list. We must remain highly skeptical of these talks.

Mr. Chairman, many Cuban nationals in Colombia who are doctors have escaped from their medical slave camps in Venezuela. They sought asylum in Colombia. Under U.S. law, these eligible Cuban nationals can come to the United States under the Cuban Medical Professional Parole Program, yet these Cubans in Colombia are having problems with our embassy vetting their cases. Are embassies in Latin America sending a message to Cuban nationals that are seeking asylum that due to this dangerous establishment of diplomatic relations between the United States and Cuba, that the legitimate cases of Cuban asylum cases will no longer be welcome?

And today I was joined by my colleagues Mario Diaz-Balart, Albio Sires, and Carlos Curbelo in sending a letter to Ambassador Whitaker and Immigration Director Rodriguez urging our Government to prioritize these cases and allow any eligible Cuban to come to the United States.

And, Mr. Chairman, I will ask for unanimous consent to make these letters a part of the record.

Mr. DUNCAN. Without objection, so ordered.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. I yield back. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. DUNCAN. I also ask unanimous consent to enter into the record a letter from Senator Marco Rubio, chairman of the Western Hemisphere Subcommittee, to Mr. Aronson, dated February 26, 2015.

Without objection, so ordered.

Before I recognize the panelists, just to explain the lighting system. You are given 5 minutes. And when it gets down to a minute, it will turn yellow. And when it gets to red, please try to find a wrap up.

I may have a little leniency because there is only two of you, but I am sure our committee have has a lot of questions, and we will have votes later on this afternoon.

Other members of the committee are reminded they can submit opening statements for the record.

And so we will go ahead and get started. First, the biographies are in your materials provided, so I am not going to read those. The first panelist to be recognized will be the Honorable Bernard Aronson, Special Envoy to the Colombian Peace Process.

And Mr. Aronson, I am going to recognize you first.

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE BERNARD ARONSON, SPECIAL ENVOY TO THE COLOMBIAN PEACE PROCESS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Mr. ARONSON. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Sires, my old friend Congresswoman Ros-Lehtinen, and others on the committee.

I think it is very important that the committee is holding this hearing today. We have had a 25-year partnership with Colombia. The first thing that crossed my desk when I was Assistant Secretary of State in 1989 was a $50-million request from Colombia to help them defeat the Medellin Cartel and Pablo Escobar. And that was passed with bipartisan support. Passed the Andean Trade Preference Initiative. Plan Colombia was an unprecedented bipartisan commitment to another country, which I think, as both President Uribe and President Santos have acknowledged, helped Colombia save itself from being the potential of being a failed state, as the chairman said, and really allowed it to fundamentally change the relationship on the battlefield to the advantage of the government. And we now have a free trade agreement, as you know.

And I would just remind the committee that this partnership has been a two-way street. When the United States in 1991 was assembling a Security Council vote to take on Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait, Colombia was a member of the Security Council and stood by our side. In Afghanistan, Colombia, at U.S. request, provided assistance and personnel and training to the Afghan Government in counternarcotics. They are working with us today in Central America and with the Mexican Government. So this has been a very powerful and important strategic relationship. The Colombian people greatly value this relationship.

And, Mr. Chairman, you said, you know, expressed your love for Colombia. I would say, of all the countries in Latin America, the one in which that love is most reciprocated is Colombia. They appreciate the role we played. So I think I applaud this committee for continuing that bipartisan interest and that commitment.

You know, just the other day, a 7-year-old girl was killed in Colombia when she stepped on an explosive device. And she is one of the 225,000 Colombians killed in this conflict that you have cited. If we translated that into U.S. population terms, that would mean we would have lost 1.4 million Americans. So this is a terrible, devastating conflict, as you noted, Mr. Chairman and ranking member. It has gone on for 51 years. It has displaced 5 million to 6 million Colombians; polluted the waters; particularly impacted indigenous people, Afro-Colombians, and marginalized people; and it is time to end the war.

President Santos ran on a clear reelection platform that he was committed to negotiating an end to the war. He won reelection. I think he won a mandate to pursue this. And I would say that he has pursued the peace with great courage and at some political cost. And as difficult as war is, it is kind of clear what to do always, and you know who the enemy is and you know the choices you make.

The peace process is very complicated and not so easy to push forward. It is a bit of a roller coaster. When things are going well, when they pass an agreement to cooperate in demining, support for the peace process goes up. When the FARC blows up power systems and water systems and oil pipelines, as it has done in recent weeks, and killed policemen and Armed Forces, not surprisingly support goes down.

Let me just say a word about my role, and then really let Deputy Assistant Secretary—I am sorry, I called you by your colleague's name.

Anyway, President Obama had spoken with both President Santos, Secretary of State Kerry had spoken to President Santos on several occasions toward the end of last year and early in this year. And the President voiced a desire to see the U.S. more visibly engaged in the peace process. And he raised the idea of the U.S. appointing a special envoy. And as I said, President Obama and Secretary of State have enormous respect and confidence in President Santos. And they acceded to that request. And I was asked if I would serve in this position.

Let me just say what I am not and let me say what I do. I am not a classic mediator. I don't go and sit at the bargaining table. I don't convene meetings. I don't shuttle between the two sides. I don't offer bridging proposals. This is a negotiation between the Government of Colombia and the FARC with various friends of the process who have been invited in by the parties.

So what do I do? Well, I am available to President Santos and his advisers to share ideas, to talk about strategy, to review past peace processes that I may have some experience with, such as El Salvador, that could be relevant.

I sit in on sessions solely with the FARC and then separately with the government because the government felt that that might be useful to try to educate the FARC about U.S. policy, whether we

would support a peace settlement if it happened, and to some extent interpret where they are to the government. And that is the role I play. I have been to Havana four times. I am going on my fifth trip on Thursday morning.

And I also interact with significant players in Colombian political life. I talk to President Uribe. I am seeing President Gaviria, President Pastrana, all of whom I have known and worked with over the years when I go to Bogota.

It is not a secret that the peace talks are in a difficult moment. The unilateral cease-fire that the FARC had announced in December broke down after the FARC attacked and killed an Army unit, killing 11 soldiers, wounding 17. And the President responded by resuming aerial bombardment. And there has been escalating conflict since that time.

You know, at the end of the day, the FARC has to decide whether it is serious about peace and whether it has the will to embrace a peace that the Colombian people will accept. And I think the two of you, the ranking member and the chairman, laid out those principles pretty well. They have to relinquish armed struggle, give up their weapons, renounce and get out of any criminal activity, make reparations, submit themselves to transitional justice, and demobilize and rejoin Colombian society as a lawful political entity. Whether they will get there or not I honestly can't tell you. There is a lot of history to overcome, a lot of suspicion. And I don't think they are improving their case at all by blowing up water systems and pipelines and making life hard and difficult for ordinary Colombians.

But the United States wants to be supportive, as this committee has done. We don't intend to interfere. As I said, we do not always announce. I don't have a blueprint to impose, nor is it our place to impose a settlement on the Colombian people. They do the fighting and the dying. But we have made it clear, you know, our strong concern on counternarcotics and our strong concern on the rule of law and our strong concern on meeting international obligations. So I think I will just close there and turn it over to my colleague.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Aronson follows:]

Remarks as prepared to the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere

Bernard Aronson, U.S. Special Envoy for the Colombian Peace Process
Washington, DC

June 24, 2015

Chairman Duncan, Ranking Member Sires, Members of the Committee, thank you for convening this hearing to discuss the Colombian peace process. I appreciate your interest. In my view, the attention of this committee is representative of the deep and longstanding bipartisan support in Congress that has made U.S. policy towards Colombia so successful over so many years.

Colombians have suffered for more than half a century in the longest continuing military conflict in the western hemisphere. Over 225,000 Colombians have lost their lives. If that number were translated into U.S. population terms it would mean the death of 1.4 million of our citizens. Thousands have been disabled. Many of them are children. Just 2 weeks ago a 7 year old girl was killed when she stepped on an explosive device. Nearly 6 million Colombians have been displaced from their homes. Land and streams have been despoiled. Indigenous peoples and minority communities such as Afro-Colombians and other vulnerable populations have suffered the most.

The Colombian people want this war to end. President Juan Manuel Santos won re-election with a clear mandate to seek a negotiated settlement. He has pursued the peace with great courage and dedication despite political risk and costs. President Obama and Secretary of State Kerry have enormous respect for President Santos and confidence in his leadership. So when President Santos asked the President and the Secretary to raise the level of U.S. support and engagement with the peace process, they did not hesitate. I was appointed U.S. Special Envoy to the peace process in February.

I have been working on Colombian affairs since I served as Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs from 1989 to 1993. In my first week at the Department of State, the Government of Colombia sought and received $50 million in additional military assistance to combat Pablo Escobar and the Medellin cartel's violent campaign against the Colombian state. The Administration and Congress on a bi-partisan basis passed the Andean Trade Preferences Act. I was

an early advocate of Plan Colombia and a strong visible supporter of the FTA. I have known President Santos for more than 20 years.

Let me briefly describe my role. First, I am the U.S. Envoy to the peace process, but I am not a negotiator or a mediator. I offer suggestions, share lessons learned from other peace talks, and explain U.S. interests. I respond to requests from President Santos and his negotiating team to exchange ideas and strategies. However, the negotiations are between the Colombian government and the FARC; the decisions are hammered out between the two sides.

Second, I am not a neutral party. I am participating at the request of and in support of the Colombian government. I coordinate my efforts closely with President Santos and his government.

As you know, the Colombian government has pursued peace negotiations with the FARC since October 2012. Cuba and Norway serve as "guarantor" countries, hosting, observing and facilitating the discussions. Venezuela and Chile serve as "accompanying countries," receiving regular reports, and urging progress in the peace talks.

The agenda items agreed to by both Parties at the start of the talks are: (1) agrarian reform; (2) political participation; (3) illicit drugs; (4) justice and victims' rights; and (5) disarmament/end of the conflict. The parties have reached partial and preliminary agreement on the first three items.

In December of last year the FARC declared an "indefinite and unilateral ceasefire." In March, the government announced it would suspend aerial bombing in response. These decisions were followed by a significant drop in FARC violence, especially against infrastructure. In March, the parties agreed to cooperate on clearing landmines. And this month, agreement was reached on establishment of a Truth Commission.

However, on April 14, the FARC violated its own ceasefire in an attack in Cauca that resulted in 11 dead and 20 wounded Colombian soldiers. President Santos resumed bombing, after which the FARC formally suspended its unilateral cease fire. Since the ceasefire suspension, there have been 81 violent actions according to a leading security NGO, with an estimated 41 guerillas and almost 20 police and military killed.

FARC attacks in the past three weeks against electric power towers left an estimated one million people in the cities of Buenaventura, Tumaco, and Florencia temporarily without power. Their attacks on oil infrastructure have damaged the environment and cut water supplies to thousands.

We are at a difficult stage in the talks. But both President Santos and the FARC have remained at the negotiating table. The smaller, more urban based guerilla group, the National Liberation Army, has refused to enter a negotiation to date.

The talks could accelerate and lead to breakthroughs or the talks could falter and start to fail. What is clear, however, is that we must continue our engagement. As Secretary Kerry noted, "the United States is going to continue to stand by Colombians' side in this journey."

The United States' strategic partnership with Colombia has progressively deepened, become more diversified, and has been strengthened. When in 1991 the United States was mobilizing an international coalition to reverse Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, Colombia, as a then member of the UN Security Council, stood side-by-side with us. As our international cooperation continued to deepen and mature, Colombia later provided personnel and training to help the Afghan government combat narcotrafficking at the United States' request. And today, Colombia and the United States are partners with Central America and Mexico in combatting narcotrafficking and cartel violence.

There has been no clearer sign of the strength of the U.S. Colombian relationship than Plan Colombia. In the late 1990s, Colombia's government, society, and institutions were besieged by the most powerful crime syndicates in the world and two guerilla insurgencies. In response, the U.S. government came together on a bipartisan basis to support Plan Colombia.

While the United States provided, resources, hareware, assistance and training under Plan Colombia, the Colombian government raised taxes and expanded their armed forces and provided the strategic leadership, the hard work, and the vision under former President Alvaro Uribe and then Defense Minister Juan Manuel Santos that transformed the balance of military forces in Colombia.

Under Plan Colombia, the number of insurgents has been reduced by two-thirds by military action and demobilizations. Homicides have dropped by nearly half from the peak in 2002. Annual economic growth has averaged above four percent over

most of the last decade. Millions have been lifted out of poverty. The World Bank listed Colombia as the best place to do business in the southern hemisphere.

Colombians deserve the credit for the transformation that took place in their country under Plan Colombia. Those successes I believe brought the FARC to the bargaining table. At a time when it is fashionable to lament that bi-partisan cooperation has disappeared, it is worth noting that Plan Colombia due to sustained bi-partisan support helped save a nation and an American ally. Whether the future brings peace, as we all hope, or the FARC refuses to take what may be Colombia's last opportunity for a negotiated settlement, it is vital that this bipartisan support continues.

Chairman Duncan, Ranking Member Sires, Members of the Committee, I am grateful for your strong support for the peace process and our partnership with Colombia.

I look forward to your questions.

Mr. DUNCAN. I want to thank the gentleman.

The next panelist is Mr. Alex Lee. He is Deputy Assistant Secretary of South America and Cuba in the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, U.S. Department of State.

And I will say this, you used to have a gentleman working there in your department, Tim Hall from South Carolina, who I know well. And he is now in Iraq, economic affairs. But you lost a good one there.

So now, Mr. Lee, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF MR. ALEX LEE, DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR SOUTH AMERICA AND CUBA, BUREAU OF WESTERN HEMISPHERE AFFAIRS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Mr. LEE. Chairman Duncan, Ranking Member Sires, and members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity. I would like to focus my comments on some of the implications of our bilateral relationship and our regional interests and global concerns related to the Colombia peace process.

In naming Special Envoy Aronson to his position, Secretary Kerry noted, quote:

> "Today Colombia is a critical ally for the United States. But despite Colombia's remarkable story and all that it has achieved as a nation, the country has continued to suffer the tragic effects of one of the longest running wars on the planet. For 20 years, the United States has been Colombia's steadfast ally. We know that if the parties were able to reach an agreement, this would unleash enormous potential for the Colombian people, and it would have a profound impact throughout Latin America."

I am not suggesting that we get ahead of ourselves. Make no mistake, the talks are at a critical stage. We condemn the continuing terrorism by the FARC. We agree with President Santos that these actions are wholly inconsistent with a commitment to peace. At the same time, we should bear in mind that the progress in achieving peace is part of a virtuous circle which benefits not just the victims but all of Colombia and, indeed, the wider community of nations. Building a durable peace can help Colombia invest more in education and development. With growing security and defense of human rights, more children will succeed, and vulnerable populations will begin to participate fully in the economic and social life. Broad-based economic growth, together with a safe and secure population, will boost Colombia's ability to engage regionally and globally to support our common interests.

This virtuous circle is not theoretical. It describes Colombia's history over the last decade. We got to this point not by accident but rather by ongoing international effort, including strong bipartisan support in Washington. The support of the U.S. Congress has been instrumental to everything we have achieved. Together with Colombia, we have worked to promote reconciliation, compensate victims, return land to the displaced, and prepare for the post-conflict period. We are helping Colombia build safer communities, training police, judges, and prosecutors.

Since 2000, kidnappings in Colombia have plummeted 90 percent, and homicides have dropped nearly 50 percent. There has been significant media attention to the 2014 increase in coca production as well as Colombia's decision to halt aerial eradication in the coming months. We are working with the Colombian Government to develop alternative plans. We anticipate that Colombia will support expanded manual eradication, more vigorous interdiction to compensate for the loss of aerial eradication, and continued U.S. assistance will be important to this effort.

Colombia's commitment to combat counternarcotics has been evident for more than a decade and has led to a trend of declining coca cultivation. We do not question Colombia's commitment to counternarcotics. With our Colombian partners, we are expanding educational opportunities, including training more than 800 Colombian public school teachers in English. We are investing in opportunities for vulnerable groups. Through the Women's Entrepreneurship of the Americas, we helped more than 80 women business owners grow their businesses. We are strengthening their already robust economic ties with a Colombia that has significantly reduced poverty. The U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement boosted U.S. exports to Colombia by 42 percent, to $20 billion since 2012.

We are also making progress in promoting human rights, although they remain significant challenges. The government provides protective services for over 7,500 at-risk citizens, which is commendable, yet much more must be done to prosecute those who kill, attack, and threaten human rights defenders and others. Our bilateral regional security plan will implement more than 200 capacity-building programs in Central America and the Caribbean. And we have trained over 22,000 Colombian law enforcement officials to share their expertise in the region.

I would urge caution in any talk of a peace dividend. The investments we have made in Colombia over close to two decades, whether through foreign assistance, continuing messages of bipartisan political support in Washington, or in time invested in building relations, have benefited the United States in security, economic, and political gains. But we should not spike the ball at the 5-yard line by cutting back on this investment.

Chairman Duncan and Ranking Member Sires, members of the committee, those of us who have followed Colombia closely during the last decade have been profoundly inspired by how Colombia has turned itself into a self-confident, prosperous, and sought-after partner on the world stage. I know that if we can help the Colombian people reach their enduring quest for peace, we will come to see how much more Colombia has to offer. Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Lee follows:]

Remarks as prepared to the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere

Alex Lee
Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs
Washington, DC

June 24, 2015

Chairman Duncan, Ranking Member Sires, Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss Colombia's peace process. Our distinguished Special Envoy Bernard Aronson will discuss the negotiations and his work in more detail. I will review some of the implications for our bilateral relationship, regional interests, and global concerns.

In naming Special Envoy Aronson to his position in February, Secretary Kerry noted, "today, Colombia is a critical ally for the United States. And we are working hard together to promote security and economic prosperity throughout the Western Hemisphere and the world. But despite Colombia's remarkable story and all that it has achieved as a nation, the country has continued to suffer the tragic effects of one of the longest running wars on the planet… For 20 years the United States has been Colombia's steadfast ally in this conflict… We know that if the parties were able to reach an agreement…this would unleash enormous potential for the Colombian people and it would have an impact throughout Latin America and perhaps even beyond."

I am not suggesting we get ahead of ourselves. Make no mistake, the talks are at a critical stage, perhaps the most difficult to date. We condemn the continuing terrorism by the FARC, including brutal killings and assaults on infrastructure. We agree with President Santos that these actions only bring destruction and suffering to the Colombian people and are wholly inconsistent with a commitment to peace. We support President Santos' call for the FARC to accelerate progress at the peace talks.

At the same time, we should bear in mind that progress in achieving peace is part of a virtuous circle, which benefits not just the families of victims but all of Colombia, Latin America, and indeed the wider community of nations. Building a durable peace deal can help Colombia invest more in education and promote economic development. With these investments and growing security and defense of human rights, more children succeed and vulnerable populations begin to

participate fully in economic and social life. Broad-based economic growth, together with a safe and secure population, boosts Colombia's ability to engage regionally and globally to support security, advance economic prosperity, and defend human rights.

This virtuous circle is not theoretical, it is real. In fact, it describes Colombia's history over the last decade. The future benefits of a Colombia at peace will also be very real, but even more dramatically positive. We did not get to this point by accident, but rather by ongoing investment by the international community, including strong bipartisan support in Washington. The support of the U.S. Congress has been instrumental to everything that the United States has achieved with Colombia, and your support will be needed now more than ever as Colombia attempts to find a real and lasting peace.

Together with Colombia, we have worked to promote reconciliation and prepare for the post-conflict period. The Colombian government has enacted ambitious social reforms supporting transitional justice, such as the 2011 Victims' and Land Restitution Law, which seeks to provide reparations and land restitution to seven million registered conflict victims. We have supported the government's work to restore more than 84,516 hectares of land to 11,401 displaced persons.

We are helping Colombia build safer communities, training police, judges and prosecutors. Since 2000, kidnappings in Colombia have plummeted 90 percent and homicides have dropped nearly 50 percent.

There has been significant media attention to the 2014 increase in coca production as well as Colombia's decision to halt aerial cocaine eradication in the coming months. We are working together with our Colombian partners to develop alternative plans to respond. We anticipate Colombia will support expanded manual eradication and interdiction to compensate for the loss of aerial eradication, and continued U.S. assistance will be important to this effort. We do not doubt Colombia's commitment to combat counternarcotics – their will and focus has been evident for more than a decade and led to a six year trend of declining coca cultivation.

A second area where we are advancing with our Colombian partners is expanding educational opportunities. The United States has trained more than 800 Colombian public school teachers in English language and teaching methodology. In a recognition of the need to invest in the Colombian people, President Santos

recently announced that, despite the conflict, his government will, for the first time, spend more on education than on defense.

We are investing in opportunities for vulnerable groups. Through the Women's Entrepreneurship in the Americas Initiative (WEAmericas), Embassy Bogota organized a TechCamp to help more than 80 women business owners to grow their businesses with technology solutions. Our $1.8 million Beca Scholarship program facilitates entry of qualified Afro-Colombian and indigenous youth into Colombian National Police academies. The program has produced more than 1,800 active police officers.

We continue to support Colombia's increased energy opportunities, as well as Colombia's energy leadership in the region. Together, Colombia and the United States announced the "Connecting the Americas 2022 Initiative" at the 2012 Summit of the Americas, and Colombia joined us at the Caribbean Energy Security Summit. We are also coordinating on energy: we provide technical support to help Colombian businesses develop offshore oil and unconventional gas responsibly, defend biodiversity, promote conservation, and reduce illegal mining.

We are strengthening our already robust economic ties with a Colombia which has significantly reduced poverty and extreme poverty. The U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement is fostering economic growth in both nations. Since the FTA took effect in 2012, U.S. exports to Colombia have grown 42 percent to $20.3 billion in 2014. Colombian companies have capitalized on competitive advantages from the FTA. According to ProColombia, 1,908 Colombian companies exported to the United States for the first time in the first two and a half years of the CTPA, and consumers in the United States can now enjoy more than 430 new imported Colombian products.

We are also making progress in promoting human rights, though there are significant challenges. On labor, the government has reaffirmed its commitment to the Labor Action Plan, and we are encouraging them to do more. Impunity is a continuing concern, as are continuing threats and attacks against human rights defenders and labor unionists. The government provides protective measures for over 7,500 at-risk citizens, which is commendable, yet more must be done to prosecute those who kill, attack, and threaten human rights defenders and others.

Finally, we are strengthening security regionally and across the globe. Our bilateral law enforcement cooperation is second to none. Colombia has trained more than 22,000 security officials on its own, and this year our bilateral regional

security plan will implement more than 200 capacity-building programs in Central America and the Caribbean. We are delighted Colombia has agreed to contribute to UN peacekeeping, and we support its aspirations to become a NATO partner. In fact, this summer Colombia is deploying an ocean patrol vessel to support Operation OCEAN SHIELD, a NATO counterpiracy mission off the coast of Somalia.

I would caution that talk of a "peace dividend" and reduced need for support to Colombia may be an alluring proposition, but it is also an illusory one. The investments we have made in Colombia over close to two decades – whether through foreign assistance, continuing messages of bipartisan political support in Washington, or time invested building relations with the Colombian government and people – have benefited the United States in security, economic, and political gains. With a peace agreement, the results will be all the more impressive. But we should not spike the ball on the five yard line by cutting back on this investment.

Chairman Duncan, Ranking Member Sires, Members of the Committee, I have been privileged to work on Colombian issues since 1999, first as the Senior Colombia Desk Officer at the conception of Plan Colombia, then as the Political and Economic Counselor at our Embassy in Bogota, and for the past year and half in my current position. In 1999, many Colombians questioned the ability of their government to survive. Those of us who have followed Colombia closely since that difficult decade have been profoundly inspired by how Colombia has turned itself into a self-confident, increasingly prosperous, sought-after partner on the world stage. I know that, if we can help the Colombian people reach their enduring quest for peace, we will come to see how much more Colombia has to offer to its people and to the world.

Thank you for the opportunity to meet with you today and for your continuing commitment to Colombia.

I look forward to your questions.

Mr. DUNCAN. I want to thank the gentleman.

I will now open it up for the question segment. And I recognize myself for 5 minutes. In March, Mr. Aronson, you held separate closed-door meetings with the Colombian Government and the FARC negotiators in Havana. This was the first meeting between the U.S. and FARC since 1998. What role does the FARC say the U.S. should play in the region going forward? What is their thought process about the U.S. involvement?

Mr. ARONSON. Well, thank you for that question, Mr. Chairman. I think they were, frankly, curious about what role we would play in two dimensions. One, are we supportive of the peace process? And will we be supportive of the settlement? And they have some legitimate concerns in that area, particularly about their own security, given the history of the Union Patriotica in 1985. And I was able to tell them that in fact if they disarm, demobilize, reintegrate, get out of criminal activity, meet their responsibilities under justice, you know, the United States is not hostile to an agreement that includes rural development and land for campesinos, and roads and bridges to allow peasants to get their crops out of the country. So I think that is an important message. It is a similar message, frankly, that I delivered to the FMLN a long time ago when we were trying to negotiate an end to the Salvadoran war.

Mr. DUNCAN. They are pretty clear on the U.S. position that they need to lay down their arms and stop the violence and be held accountable under the rule of law?

Mr. ARONSON. I don't think they have any illusions about that. But I would say that is the coming government's position, and we completely agree with that and support it. But I am always careful to make it clear that we don't have a separate position from the Colombians. But I don't think they have any illusions about those issues.

Mr. DUNCAN. So is your role more of just one of observation if you are not carrying a message from the American Government about what peace looks like?

Mr. ARONSON. I do carry such a message. But it is in support of the Colombian Government's agenda. I certainly make it clear that we support both the implementation of an agreement in areas that we have been supporting for many years, such as I mentioned, rural development, but also that we support the government's demand that they disarm and demobilize and reintegrate, that they give up criminal activity. You know, they have no illusions that that is what the United States believes.

Mr. DUNCAN. If the FARC refuses to lay down their arms, demobilize, or face jail time or some sort of reparations for the crimes that they have committed, what hope is there for justice and a peace accord?

Mr. ARONSON. What hope is there for justice in a peace accord?

Mr. DUNCAN. What hope is there for justice and a peace accord? If they are refusing to meet some of the requirements that Santos has put forward, and I believe the free world stands with that—lay down your arms, demobilize, and pay reparations for your crimes, whether that is jail time or what not—what hope is there?

Mr. ARONSON. Well, I think if they don't lay down their arms in a reasonable timetable, there is no hope for a peace agreement. No government of Colombia is going to make a peace agreement in which they remain an armed force for some extended period of time. So I think disarmament is key. Justice for victims and the transitional justice that you mentioned is also a significant element of the end game. But if they are not willing to embrace disarmament, then you are not talking peace, you know, you are talking some armed truce. I don't think the Colombian Government is going to accept that.

Mr. DUNCAN. Right. Let me shift to Mr. Lee.

I traveled down with Chairman Royce back in November. And we visited with President Santos in Bogota. But before we got to Colombia, kind of reversing our trip back, we spent some time in Peru. And we saw the manual eradication process of coca fields in the mountains.

And when Chairman Engel gets here, he was there. We actually participated to see the significant effort, really, to eradicate those crops manually. And so I am not going to question the Colombian people's decision because I believe it was the Colombian people's decision not to do aerial spraying. But I do think that not allowing aerial spraying will have a detrimental effect on the progress made to eradicate the coca crops because I believe that the manual process is time-consuming, labor-intensive, and it is going to be tough in the mountains of Colombia. So what are your thoughts on that?

If we don't eradicate the coca crop, then we don't cut off the funding source for the FARC. How is that going to affect their ability to operate? So you can talk broadly about the eradication aerial spraying issue, but kind of shift it more toward funding for FARC if you don't mind.

Mr. LEE. We respect the decision and the sovereign decision of the Colombian Government to terminate aerial eradication. We may regret it, but that is a decision that we respect that the Colombian Government has made. But we are in the process of thinking through with the Colombian Government on ways that we can both work together to take advantage of the various tools that we have and augment them to address the counternarcotics challenge because both countries remain firmly committed to combating narcotics cultivation, production, and trafficking. And some of the things that we are talking about we have been already doing, such as manual eradication or interdiction, and in addition to developing and prosecuting cases against major traffickers.

But there are also additional tools that we are in discussion with the Colombian Government in order to reach a package that we can put forward to our respective leaders to deal with this challenge. It is our goal to cut the recipients of narcotics trafficking to all illicit actors, including the FARC, including those that have no pretense of ideological affiliation. And we see a Colombian Government equally determined in that shared goal.

Mr. DUNCAN. You know how difficult it is to manually eradicate a coca tree. You can't just machete these things. You need to pull them up by the roots.

Mr. LEE. We are aware of the particular challenges of manual eradication. It puts the eradicators in a certain danger. It is labor-

and time-intensive. It requires security packages. But as I said, I think there are a variety of other tools that we can use in combination to——

Mr. DUNCAN. I agree with you. Let me ask you this. Are you aware of USAID's, anything that they are doing in Colombia for alternative crop production, training these farmers? A lot of them are peasants hired by the FARC to go out and plant these areas, slash and burn the jungle, come back and replant, and then harvest the coca leaves. So are you aware—and what we saw in Peru is a USAID program which I think is very effective in alternative crop training. Are you aware of anything going on in Colombia like that?

Mr. LEE. That is one of the areas that we are talking with the Colombian Government. We have done it in the past.

Mr. DUNCAN. Is Colombia doing any of that as well?

Mr. LEE. I think that it has—we did it for a while, and we are looking at ways in certain areas that we can start up additional programs. But I think it depends on specific locations.

Mr. DUNCAN. All right. And I will finish up with this. The FARC is known to have deep ties with Hezbollah and other transnational criminal organizations. This committee well aware knows very fully my interest in the Iranian threat in this hemisphere and Iranian activity in this hemisphere, either through its proxy Hezbollah or directly. And I am curious about what impact a peace agreement may have on Hezbollah and Iran's activities in the Western Hemisphere. If you could touch on that.

Mr. LEE. That is a bit of a hypothetical. I guess I would make the observation that we remain acutely alert to whatever activities Hezbollah or other groups or Iran in the region, we certainly will call out any activities that we find suspect. But I will have to see—we will have to see how a peace process would affect those sets of relationships because I am not in a position to forecast it.

Mr. DUNCAN. I would encourage the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs to take a closer look at the Iranian activity directly or indirectly through its proxies in the Western Hemisphere. I would recommend that the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs talk with General Kelly at SOUTHCOM. I would recommend that the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs be very aware of what is here.

And, with that, I will turn to the ranking member, Mr. Sires.

Mr. SIRES. I see that the ranking member of the full committee is here, and he asked me if he could speak.

So I am going to let Congressman Engel.

Mr. DUNCAN. Mr. Engel, you are recognized.

Mr. ENGEL. Thank you very much, Chairman Duncan. Thank you for calling the hearing.

Mr. Sires, thank you very much for your courtesy. And I listened as I came in to some of your observations, Mr. Chairman, about the trip we took together to Colombia and Peru several months ago. And these trips are always eye-opening. In my previous life, I served as chairman of this subcommittee. And I think of all the work I have done, this is the most gratifying.

There is so much that needs to be done, so much where our presence is necessary, and so much—when it comes to Colombia—

progress that has been made. And I have been to Colombia many, many, many, many times. And each time I go, I always feel an exhilarating feeling because when you look at Colombia on the verge of really becoming a failed state not that long ago, the United States has had no better partner and ally in South America than Colombia. And in the 1990s, they teetered on the edge of being a failed state. And over the last decade, the progress made in Colombia has just been unbelievable.

A couple of statistics: Between 2002 and 2014, Colombia saw a 90-percent decrease in kidnappings and a 54-percent reduction in homicides. And it was partnership here in Washington that helped with that process. When the Clinton administration and the Republican-controlled Congress got behind Plan Colombia in the late 1990s, there were clear goals: Weaken the FARC to the point that they would sit down at the negotiating table and close the chapter on the longest ongoing armed conflict in the Western Hemisphere. That is precisely what is happening now.

And I want to thank Special Envoy Aronson for supporting the Colombian Government during these ongoing negotiations. It is very, very important, and I commend all your good work.

And Mr. Secretary, as well, we appreciate all the people that just do so much.

The Western Hemisphere is our hemisphere. And I have long thought that we don't give it the attention it deserves, mainly because we always seem to have pressing problems elsewhere in the world. But we should really remember that things that happen here have a direct effect on us in the same hemisphere. So our work is obviously not over. And now more than ever, the United States must continue to stand with Colombia. We have supported the Colombian Government through years of war. And I believe we must support the country in peace just as in war. And if a peace agreement is reached, we in Congress need to do our part to provide Colombia with the assistance it needs.

So thank you for allowing me the opportunity to join you today. And let me ask the witnesses, both of them, what role do you envision for the United Nations, the OAS, and other international bodies if a peace agreement is reached with the FARC? Do you think that U.N. peacekeepers will be needed in Colombia? And I personally strongly support new assistance for Colombia to implement a peace agreement with the FARC. At the same time, though, Colombia no longer needs the U.S. to provide funding in the same way it once did. So if a peace deal was reached with the FARC, how do you envision foreign assistance to Colombia over the next 5 to 10 years?

Mr. ARONSON. Mr. Engel, thank you for those very helpful remarks and your personal remarks toward me. And I just want to underscore what you said. Latin America usually suffers because we don't pay enough attention. But when we pay attention in a bipartisan way, you know, we can have great success. We did so in Central America when we negotiated a bipartisan accord on Central America in 1989 and defeated the Sandinistas with Violeta de Chamorro's democratic government and ended the war in El Salvador. Plan Colombia, as you say, is another great example of that.

The parties have discussed possible roles for outside monitors and verifiers in a disarmament demobilization regime. They haven't agreed on exactly what role for what agency, but they have been talking to both the OAS and the U.N. and UNASUR. And I think that it is not unlikely that there will be some kind of verification monitoring role for one or several of those institutions. But, again, the parties haven't reached agreement on that. As for the funding levels, I will let Deputy Assistant Secretary Lee discuss that. I think he is the best source.

Mr. LEE. Thank you very much, Congressman Engel.

Right now we are essentially in a wait and see mode on how the peace process unfolds. That said, many of the things that we have been doing, particularly in recent years, and the programs that we have been championing to Congress and received support from Congress, and working with our Colombian partners, actually will form a good basis in any peace agreement because many of the things that we are doing include strengthening law enforcement, strengthening rule of law, working for building capacity of NGOs to monitor human rights. A whole variety of humanitarian programs that support the victims law, which provides a whole variety of assistance to many of those who have been direct victims of the conflict. There are approximately 7 million individuals, most of those have been internally displaced. And so we provide prevention support. We provide comprehensive assistance and job retraining, medical attention. Those kinds of programs, obviously, I think will continue.

We also have programs that have been very targeted to Afro-Colombians and indigenous groups. And since about 2011 to this year, you know, we have channeled about $61 million for programs that help these groups that have been disproportionately hit hard by the conflict to get employment, to get land titles, to seek legal redress. So these kinds of programs I think are already in place. We will probably continue, expand, or contract, depending on what our Colombian partners come to us and say after they have negotiated a peace agreement. But we have I think a basis on which to build, a good foundation on which to build, that could support a peace process.

Mr. ENGEL. Well, thank you very much, again, both of you for your good work.

Chairman Duncan, Ranking Member Sires, thank you for your courtesy.

Mr. DUNCAN. Thank you.

Ranking Member Engel was, along with Chairman Royce, on the trip in November, as was Mr. Yoho from Florida, and Mr. Salmon, where we saw the eradication process that I talk about. We also had the opportunity to sit down with President Santos and hear about the progress as of November. So it was very informative.

The Chair will now go to recognize the gentlelady from Florida, Ms. Ros-Lehtinen, for 5 minutes.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Aronson, on February 28, the Colombian Navy seized a Chinese freighter en route to Havana. And the vessel's cargo? Around 100 tons of powder, 2.6 million detonators, 99 projectiles, and around 3,000 cannon shells. The weapons and the war materiel

were hidden in the hull of a ship under 28,451 tons of cereal. Colombia's Defense Minister had said his military had confiscated and destroyed the war materiel from the FARC. So the Chinese ship was captured by the Colombian Navy, and it was scheduled to make stops in the Colombian ports of Cartagena and Barranquilla.

So, Mr. Aronson, in your trips to Cuba did you ask the Cuban authorities if the large weapons shipment bought by Havana was intended for the FARC? Did you ask the Cuban authorities the reason for hiding the shipment under tons of grain?

Mr. ARONSON. Congresswoman, it is a very important question. But let me make it clear I don't engage with the Cuban authorities on any bilateral issue. I really have only talked to them once when I was down there, about the progress of the peace talks. So that wouldn't have been an issue that I would normally be involved in. But I think DAS Lee——

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. If I could interrupt, but when you talk about peace talks and you have a vessel's cargo filled with war materiel, and then you have these peace talks that are going on in Cuba and it is given as a justification for lifting all kinds of—trying to lift all kinds of sanctions, it calls into question what these peace talks are all about. If the peace is about the FARC and the FARC, according to the Colombian Defense Minister, he says it is for the FARC, and the FARC is talking in Cuba with Colombians about peace, what are they doing with 100 tons of powder, 2.6 million detonators? Is that outside of your scope? It is about peace talks with a group that is transferring war materiel.

Mr. ARONSON. What I was trying to say, Congresswoman, and maybe I didn't speak clearly enough, is that I don't engage the Cuban Government or Cuban officials on bilateral issues or issues that are not directly on the table of the negotiations. That issue hasn't been on the table. That is all I was saying.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Okay. Let me just continue. I realize my time is limited.

So I remain very skeptical about these talks due to so many questions that remain about justice for victims, human rights, disarmament, impunity. And last month, along with my colleagues Mario Diaz-Balart and Carlos Curbelo, we wrote a letter to Attorney General Lynch expressing our concern that Simon Trinidad may be permitted to attend the talks in Cuba. Trinidad was the only person held responsible for the hostage-taking of three Americans. He was convicted of that crime in U.S. courts, sentenced to 60 years. It is not the first time the Obama administration releases criminals who have been targeted or even killed—who have targeted or even killed U.S. citizens. Gerardo Hernandez, one of the Cuban 5, was released by Obama. He was convicted of conspiracy to commit murder of three Americans and one U.S. resident. I fear that the Obama administration may offer up FARC leader Simon Trinidad in return for nothing in these talks.

You recently stated that Trinidad has not been discussed at all with the FARC. So my first question is, has the FARC requested to anyone, do you know of anyone they have requested for the U.S. to allow Simon Trinidad to attend the talks in Cuba?

Mr. ARONSON. I think, just to correct the record, I think you are referring to a Washington Post article that said that—but it wasn't exactly accurate. So I don't want it to be taken as my words because they weren't my words. But I have not—I have never seen any request from the FARC or the Government of Colombia that Mr. Trinidad be released. And I made it clear that that is not a subject I would be prepared to talk to the FARC about. It is not on the table.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. So, as far as you know, no one has discussed Trinidad with the FARC, which I think is one of their top priorities. Have you discussed Trinidad's fate indirectly with the FARC or through Colombians or other interlocutors?

Mr. ARONSON. Yeah. I meant to finish the point. Early in my visits to the negotiating process, the FARC raised the question about whether or not Trinidad could join the talks in some fashion, Skype or something like that. And neither the Government of Colombia—and it is really their decision if they wanted to propose that, but they have not proposed that, and I have not suggested that at this time.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you.

And I just have a few seconds left. Has the FARC asked the United States to remove the FARC from the foreign terrorist organization list if a deal is signed? Is the U.S. considering removing FARC from the terrorist list?

Mr. ARONSON. They have not asked for that, but I would not be surprised if they had some hope for that, but that isn't a subject they have asked yet.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. DUNCAN. Absolutely.

The Chair recognizes the ranking member for 5 minutes.

Mr. SIRES. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

You know, I have been involved with Colombia a long time, long before I ever became a Congressman. My district has a large number of Colombians. I have been going to Colombia many times.

And I talk to the people all the time, you know, when I go back to the district. And one of the things they are concerned is that we may be giving the FARC much too much and allow them just to become part of the society without any consequence at all for the crimes that they committed.

And to me, it is going to be more important for us to support Colombia if anything comes out of this treaty than before. And one of the concerns that I have—and I expressed this to Secretary Kerry—is the fact that we are involved in this process, the fact that America is involved. It is my view that this is an internal conversation within Colombia, with the FARC, with the Government of Colombia, who are a country of their own.

I don't see why we have to be in this negotiation. I tell you this because I think—I think—that we may be blamed if this doesn't go well. You know, we don't have a great history, South America, in the past. And I am concerned that if these negotiations don't go well, we are going to be used as the scapegoat in saying: Well, you know, the United States was there and they were asserting more influence than they needed to be and trying to influence the Santos Government or saying, Don't give in, don't give in.

So I expressed this to Secretary Kerry. I know you don't feel the same way, okay. So tell me why. Tell me if you ever had this scenario. You know, have you ever thought of this scenario?

Mr. ARONSON. Well, I appreciate the question. And the larger question you raised is very important every time we are involved in Latin America, which is to not overdo our role, not to impose our role, not to be——

Mr. SIRES. You don't want to be the ugly Americans.

Mr. ARONSON. Exactly. And I think we have learned some lessons over decades that I think have served us well in the region. And I might quarrel with you in a little bit in another forum if we had time about our record in the region because I think there is many, many things we can point to where we can be very proud of the role the United States has played.

Mr. SIRES. Yeah, from this perspective. But from the people in the Western Hemisphere, they are not so good.

Mr. ARONSON. Well, let's agree to disagree.

Mr. SIRES. Okay.

Mr. ARONSON. I think we still have work to do. But, look, you are sending a strong caution to me about my role, which I accept, which is: Don't substitute a U.S. view for a Colombian view.

And I don't intend to do that. I am only there because the President of Colombia asked the United States to appoint such a person. I have to respect his judgment that he thinks it is useful.

And I would urge you to talk to his government and his negotiations about whether they feel it has been helpful to the process. I think I could discuss some ways that I think it has been helpful, but I will leave that to the Colombians to decide.

But your overriding point I think is legitimate. I am not worried about being blamed. I would rather somehow be blamed or I don't think that would happen than to be accused of having failed to respond when Colombia asked us to help.

You know, if they think we can help end this war, which as you describe, has been a horrendous, terrible cycle of destruction and death in this country for 50 years, if we can help or they think we can help, I believe we should try. But your caution about being overbearing and, you know, throwing our weight around is a good caution. I respect what you are suggesting.

Mr. SIRES. I also say that because Uribe, he negotiated a peace treaty with the paramilitaries. And we were not really involved. We didn't send a special envoy when we asked them to drop their arms.

Mr. ARONSON. Well, I don't think that was a successful negotiation, but each President of Colombia, I think has to decide in the circumstances what is helpful. I don't know, you know, that the circumstances——

Mr. SIRES. Well, there was a significant reduction of violence and human rights violation that Uribe negotiated.

Mr. ARONSON. Well, I am not sure what you are referring to. I give great credit to President Uribe for his leadership in confronting the FARC, and he saved his country, and I speak to him often. But I am not sure what you are referring to.

But regardless of which process you are referring to, President Santos is the democratically elected president of the country. I feel

he has a right to make such a judgment. But I take your caution that we have to be careful in the role we assume.

Mr. SIRES. You know, I was one of the few Members to went to his swearing in.

Mr. ARONSON. To President Santos?

Mr. SIRES. President Santos' swearing in. We did not send one high-level dignitary—we were there, and we got rained on. Right or wrong?

Mr. ARONSON. I know, Congressman——

Mr. SIRES. At the time, I remember telling my colleague, you know, that where is the high-level dignitaries from our country here?

Mr. ARONSON. Right. Right.

Mr. SIRES. And it really was, to me, it was not right.

And I will just say something about the programs, you know, and I will finish with this: Some of these programs were started under Uribe, especially the Afro-Colombia programs, because I know that my colleague was very instrumental in talking to the leaders and was instrumental in getting Santos to continue the programs.

Mr. ARONSON. Yeah.

Mr. SIRES. So we have been involved in Colombia a long time. So my concern has been this: You know, I don't want us to be blamed for failure. You know, we get blamed for just about everything in the world.

Mr. ARONSON. This is true.

Mr. SIRES. So.

Mr. ARONSON. Well, thank you, Mr. Sires.

Mr. SIRES. All right. Thank you. I will end there.

Mr. DUNCAN. I will thank the gentleman.

I also have an article from Jose Cardenas, who is in the front row there, that I would like to submit for the record. It is worth reading on the committee.

So, without objection, so ordered.

The Chair will now go to Mr. Yoho from Florida for 5 minutes.

Mr. YOHO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate it.

Appreciate you gentlemen being here.

And I was just going to reference that article of Jose Cardenas, "Colombia's Peace Talks are on the Brink of Failure." What led to the increase in the FARC terrorist attacks? What led to this? I mean, we are on, what, round 38 of the peace talks?

Mr. ARONSON. Something like that, yes.

Mr. YOHO. What do you feel has led to this?

Mr. ARONSON. The breakdown?

Mr. YOHO. Yeah.

Mr. ARONSON. You know, it is a good question. There was a unilateral cease-fire declared by the FARC in December, but a unilateral cease-fire is inherently unstable. There are no demarcations. There is no separation of forces. There is no monitors separating the two sides. And so in the first few months of the year, as I think some of your colleagues noted, there has been a—there was a significant decrease in military encounters in violence and killings of police and Army that were——

Mr. YOHO. Right. And that is encouraging. But, you know, now we are at the——

Mr. ARONSON. Correct.

Mr. YOHO [continuing]. End of the 37th talk, and we see them backing away.

Mr. ARONSON. Yeah, I was just trying to get to that point. The precipitating cause of it was this attack in Cauca upon an Army unit that the FARC attacked and killed 11 soldiers and wounded 17 others. And I think President Santos felt that he wasn't going to stand for that. He reassumed aerial bombing and started to hit the FARC very hard and has done so. They have lost about 42 guerrillas, I think, since that time.

But I think it is a symptom of the fact that we are not at the end of the peace process in that the sides are jockeying, and the FARC wants to show that it is not going to be pressured into agreeing to something. But if you are saying, is it a bad sign, of course, it is a bad sign. It is a worrisome sign.

Mr. YOHO. Well, it leads me to the next question because it says in this study, and this is when, you know, Germany is getting involved back in April, it says they would have a panel, it would have 11 members, 3 of whom could be foreigners, and it would have 3 years to perform its work on assessing a so-called cease-fire. And it kind of worries me that, you know, if they are just posturing now, we have got a long way to go.

And what influenced the Colombian Government to move away from the chemical eradication of the cocaine fields?

Mr. ARONSON. I think their stated reason was—and Alex Lee can augment this, is that they were concerned about a study by an organization that claims an affiliation with the World Health Organization that claimed that spraying of glyphosate was a carcinogen potentially, but——

Mr. YOHO. But when you have 230,000 people killed over a course of years, what is more dangerous? And that is something I think that should be negotiated maybe a little bit differently.

I want to move on to another question. Do you see President Santos suspending the talks and remounting the military offensive against FARC because of what just happened with this article that we are reading where they have increased their terrorism?

Mr. ARONSON. Well, he definitely has stepped up the military offensive against the FARC, and the Army has had numerous successes. He did not choose to suspend the talks.

Mr. YOHO. Mr. Lee, what about you?

Mr. LEE. I will go on part about the Colombian Government's decision to halt aerial eradication using glyphosate. Basically, it was a decision that the Ministry of Health in Colombia saw a report saying that there was a possibility that the use of glyphosate in aerial eradication was carcinogenic, and then they just made a decision on that.

And so, you know, like I said a little bit earlier, we may regret that decision, but we recognize that this is the Colombian Government's sovereign right. And we are very encouraged by the conversations we are having with the Colombian Government now on figuring out how we can step up our cooperation in a variety of other areas to compensate for their decision to remove aerial eradication.

Mr. YOHO. Okay. Let me ask you another question for either one of you. What influence has Venezuela had in leading up to a breakdown of these peace talks? Especially when we see, you know, Hezbollah being a proxy of Iran moving in there. And then with the follow up of that, if the peace talks are effective with FARC, do you see ELN filling the void that is left?

Mr. ARONSON. On the first item, Congressman, I have not seen any type of evidence that Venezuela played any role in this breakdown of the cease-fire. You know, they claim that the war injures their interests, that there are many millions of refugees that come across their border, and there is instability. And so they have their own interest in wanting to see it end. But I haven't seen any evidence at all that they played any role in that.

And as far as the ELN, as you know, the Government of Colombia has made several attempts to reach out to the ELN to see if there is a framework that they could agree to, to start talks. The ELN has resisted the basic item that we—I talked about with Mr. Sires and Mr. Duncan, which is laying down of weapons and disarmament. And so the government has said, unless you are willing to commit to that, there is nothing to talk about.

Mr. YOHO. I appreciate it.

We are out of time, and I want to yield back. Thank you.

Mr. ARONSON. But I don't think that they will fill the same vacuum militarily. If the government makes peace with the FARC and the FARC disarm, the ELN doesn't have as many cadre. It doesn't have the same capabilities. But they can cause a lot of damage. I don't want to be blasé about it, but they are not at the same strength as the FARC.

Mr. DUNCAN. Gentleman's time has expired, and I thank him.

I will now go to the gentlelady from Illinois, Ms. Kelly, for 5 minutes.

Ms. KELLY. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Earlier when asked, you said to my colleague that we are at the table because we were asked to be at the table by the Colombian President. Well, in your view, what are the most significant U.S. interests in seeing that a negotiated end to Colombia's internal conflict occurs?

Mr. ARONSON. Well, that is a very good question. You know, we, as was discussed earlier in this hearing, have had a 25-year partnership with Colombia. They have been our ally and friend when we needed them, and we have been theirs, I think. And so we have invested enormous amount in the success of this country. I think most Colombians give us enormous credit for the role we have played, though they took the lead. And I would emphasis, they deserve most of the credit. They raised their taxes. They expanded their Army.

But, obviously, to see the success of Colombia in ending this war would be also seen as a foreign policy bipartisan success for the United States. It would clearly contribute to regional stability. Under the agreement, the FARC will have to renounce and get out of drug trafficking, illicit mining, extortion, kidnapping. And, obviously, that is a blow to transnational crime if it were to succeed.

And then I think, you know, there is a great moral benefit, which is, you know, not seeing another 7-year-old Colombian infant step

on an explosive device and be killed. I mean, I think we all care about the Colombian people. The chairman expressed his strong, personal feelings, and I think as Americans we want to see others, you know, enjoy the fruits of peace. And, you know, the Colombians have certainly known the horrors of war long enough.

Ms. KELLY. My other question, you talked about drug trafficking, and I think we were saying up here what we could do to eradicate that. What percentage of their trafficking comes to the United States?

Mr. ARONSON. I will let Deputy Secretary Lee answer that.

Mr. LEE. I don't have the exact figure, but the majority of their cocaine comes from—the last studies that I remember looking at showed that the majority of the cocaine that was consumed in the U.S. came from Colombia. I have to update that, relook at that, but that certainly was the case several years ago.

Ms. KELLY. So, of course, I would like to see that end, but also, I also see it on the part of the United States that if we didn't ask for or want or use so much that would help eradicate some of it also.

Mr. LEE. Correct.

Ms. KELLY. I yield back.

Mr. DUNCAN. I thank the gentlelady.

And the Chair will recognize the gentleman from Arizona, former chairman of the Western Hemisphere Subcommittee and now chairman of the Asia Pacific Subcommittee for 5 minutes.

Mr. SALMON. Hi. This whole process is starting to remind me of our situation with Iran. We have got a President that wants to negotiate a deal so badly that any deal will do. And I am kind of wondering if we are in the same spot here. We have spent $10 billion through Plan Colombia, courtesy of the U.S. taxpayer.

Peace is always a desirable outcome. We all want that. But if this peace deal is not a good deal, and it ends up throwing away all the gains or even many of the gains that the U.S. and Colombia has made and fought for over the last 15 years through negotiating away tactical things to achieve a strategic end of peace, would this not be a major problem for the U.S. national interest and a waste of almost $10 billion in American tax dollars?

And can you explain to me how these peace talks are any different than the other 38 that have happened? Is this a new and improved one, and how is this going to be any better?

Mr. ARONSON. Thank you, Congressman.

Just to clarify, the reference to 38 is 38 sessions in this peace process. This is the fourth sort of formal negotiation with the FARC.

Mr. SALMON. Okay.

Mr. ARONSON. But doesn't change the input of your question. I just want to clarify that.

Mr. SALMON. That is fine. I guess, my point is that we have been at this a long, long, long time, and there has been incredible violence still coming from the FARC. It doesn't seem like they are really serious about it. It is kind of like with us, you know. Our President comes out and says we've got a framework for a deal and their supreme leader in Iran comes out chanting "Death to America." And we don't have a deal, and they can't come on our military

bases. And I am just seeing so many eerie comparisons here, and I am just wondering, you know, is this going to cause more problems than it creates?

Mr. ARONSON. Well, I think President Santos has committed himself to peace because he got a mandate from his democratic constituency to do so. So I think we can't question his, you know, commitment to the process because he's the leader of that country, and he had a mandate from the population to pursue the peace.

You know, these are very hard questions, and I don't envy President Santos in making them. There are lots of signs of progress in the peace talks, and then there is this escalation of violence which calls into question the FARC's commitment and how serious they are. I don't personally think that there is any evidence that President Santos has or would give up, you know, gains that are important to the United States and that we would somehow come to regret a peace settlement that they would negotiate. I haven't seen any evidence of that. And I think that we are ignoring the gains in the counternarcotics effort——

Mr. SALMON. Those are a mess.

Mr. ARONSON. Let me just finish my point. If the FARC actually dismantles its network, gets out of—you know, they are one of the largest drug-trafficking cartels in the world. It is not a bad thing if they disarm and get out of the drug business and stop illegal mining, extortion. I mean, it is a good victory for democracy and the rule of law.

And it is an ally who is known as one of America's closest ally. Congressman Sires was pointing out that oftentimes we neglect Latin America. This is a good counter example where we have been a partner to Colombia, and I think seeing it to——

Mr. SALMON. I am going to reclaim my time. We have been a great partner. And I have met with President Santos on numerous occasions as well. I think he is a great guy. He was part of the Uribe administration with President Uribe. And, honestly, all the money that we spent in Colombia is beside the point. It would have never happened without the political will of one man, and that was President Uribe. I don't think it would ever happened without his political will to finally get it done.

And God bless him for that. He got it done.

And now it seems like a lot of the things that he has done and accomplished could unravel. I know that he has been very critical. He has been in my office several times very critical of these peace negotiations, that a lot of the people in Colombia don't support those peace negotiations. And so all I am saying is that I think it is all good food for thought.

You are right. President Santos is the elected leader, democratically elected leader of Colombia. I think he is a great guy and a good leader. But we also have a responsibility to advise and counsel. We don't tell them what to do. We didn't tell them what to do in Plan Colombia. It was a partnership.

Mr. ARONSON. Correct.

Mr. SALMON. We work directly with them. And I think we owe them some of our skepticism that maybe this peace process isn't all it is cracked up to be. Maybe there are other avenues that need to be pursued.

Mr. ARONSON. Well, I have very open and candid conversations with President Santos and his negotiating team. We have known each other for 20 years. I have known President Uribe for the same amount of time. I just had breakfast with him, in fact. It is a democratic society, and those skepticisms and criticisms are a part of the democratic process, and I seek out, you know, other voices.

And you are right that there is not unanimous support. I think the peace processes are kind of a roller coaster. When the demining agreement was announced, and it was actually the start of an effort to start removing mines, and it looked like the security situation was getting better, there was an uptick in support. Now with this violence and the FARC's attacks on infrastructure, there has been a decrease.

And I don't want to suggest that we are not, you know, open and sharing ideas and thoughts about it because we are. But at the end of the day, this is our ally. This is our friend. And that $10 million, which is a significant amount of money, was well spent. You are right that President Uribe deserves great credit for the success, and I have told him that to his face and so have other U.S. officials. But the U.S. really made a difference with which we should be proud of as well.

So it is a different environment and a different set of challenges in this peace process. We are not just cheerleading, and we are not going to undermine them in public, but we are trying to help them be supportive, as you suggest, as an adviser, as a counselor, but not to impose our views.

Mr. DUNCAN. Gentleman's time is expired.

They have just called votes, but I think we have time to go to Mr. Meeks, who I have learned a lot about the Western Hemisphere from. I appreciate his passion for Colombia in general, and he is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. MEEKS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Sires.

You know, years ago, when Congress debated support for Plan Colombia, I was one of those Members who supported it because I had the hope that it would help the nation come back from the brink of war. I knew then what I know now, that the ultimate answer would have to come through political dialogue.

I was heartened by former President Uribe's fantastic and tremendous commitment to Plan Colombia. Colombia put up almost on a 10-to-1 match, they put up their own money, and President Uribe was right in there doing that. And I believe that his success in bringing stability to Colombia is what has paved the way for President Santos' courageous embrace of dialogue and negotiations through the peace process.

Colombia's nearly 50-year internal armed conflict has had devastating consequences in Colombia. And the current peace process, in my estimation, is the most recent hope that that conflict can finally end, which would then make it a really good investment if we had gone through stability and now have an ending of the conflict.

And so many other nations were also affected by this conflict. You know, those that had to deal with the spillover effects we are fighting with the FARC. And that is the reason why it is not a sur-

prise that many of Colombia's neighbors support the peace talks also, the hemisphere, et cetera. But many of their neighbors want to see this process work and succeed.

And some of them have actively engaged in the peace process, in support of the peace process. But as the negotiations go on and uncertainty about prospects for conclusion grows, observers are counting the cost of failing, which is what I am concerned about. There are also observers who are calculating the cost of protracted negotiations.

And today what I want to highlight and ask questions about is another group that is counting the cost of whether or not the talks succeed. But those on the Pacific Coast of Colombia who have lived at the heart of the conflict and the scourge of accompanying violence and isolation, the future for them really hangs in the balance here. And the Afro-Colombia and indigenous communities on the Pacific Coast know the cost of both war and peace.

So I am hoping to find out, for example, and I guess I will ask you, Mr. Aronson, that the situation of the African Colombian community is in dire need right now, particularly with this ongoing conflict and the effects of BACRIM. What are we doing to help in that area with the conflict, et cetera? What are we doing to help?

Mr. ARONSON. Well, thank you for the question. And I want to pay great tribute to you, Mr. Meeks because I know over the years, the interests of the indigenous people, Afro-Colombians, have been a central concern of yours. And I think your passion about that and your interest has made it a central concern of both the Uribe and the Santos government.

I would say two things and maybe ask Alex to talk a little bit about the level of funding and support. But, you know, this is the first peace negotiation I think that has put the victims first. And as you mentioned, they not only have observed but they have participated in the peace talks and successive waves of victims, including citizens from the Afro-Colombian community and indigenous people, and that is really the centerpiece of the negotiation.

That is what justice is about, reparations for those victims, and that has to be a central part of a settlement, and President Santos has made that clear. We already have programs in place, as you know, to address some of those issues. And Ambassador Whitaker himself has made this a very important personal issue.

As far as the levels of support, Alex, do you have any information on that?

Mr. LEE. On support for the Afro-Colombian programs, it is—as Congressman Sires pointed out, these programs started in previous administration and have been supported on thanks to the support of the Members here in Congress. And since about 2011 to this year, we have about $61 million of programs, which I mentioned a little bit before, which cover a whole variety to this group that—you are quite right, Congressman Meeks—is among one of the most vulnerable groups that have experienced the conflict in the most direct and terrible manner.

And so these programs that have been championed by yourself and others is very important for Ambassador Whitaker. They provide land retitling assistance——

Mr. MEEKS. Let me just ask because I have got one other important question because I know we have got votes, and I want to just ask one other question real quick because I just came back from Colombia not too long ago, and I sat down with diverse groups of individuals from the Pacific Coast, some who don't even talk to one another.

But they all had one message—and I want to know what your opinion was—that as these negotiations are going on that, you know, when you talk about land, when you talk about politics, et cetera, that they were telling me that they didn't have a voice at the table, at the negotiating table. So my question is, do you know all the Afro-Colombians at the table in the negotiations, or are talks about after what takes place?

Because what is going on now if the violence is going to escalate or what takes place after the peace process and goes back, they are going to be affected. And from what they told me when I was just there is that they are not involved, and I was wondering whether or not you can let me know if they are at the table or not.

Mr. ARONSON. Well, that is a good question, Congressman. I do think that those communities have been involved at the level of going to the table and meeting with both sides in successive groups because I know about 120 victims have participated in the process at that level. I don't think any outside group is actually at the table when the negotiations are going forward, but I think you point to an important point, which is to make sure we use our efforts and remind the Colombian Government that these communities need to be included and their interests have to be taken into account, both land and future security. And I think we will make note of that. It is an important point. I appreciate it.

Mr. MEEKS. Thank you.

Mr. DUNCAN. I want to thank the gentleman.

I want to thank the witnesses for valuable testimony and answering the questions very frankly, I think.

I will say that the questions about this hearing, the United States is not meddling in the affairs of Colombia, but we are very interested in seeing a peaceful solution of this. When you look at the numbers that I mentioned earlier, 220,000 deaths and 5 million people displaced, it is concerning to us.

And the United States has an investment in success in Colombia. And we want to see continuation of a willing ally, a regional ally, and great trading partner, which I think we have in Colombia. And I think you have heard on both sides of the aisle that we are very concerned about seeing success in Colombia. So I want to thank you for sharing that.

And members of the subcommittee will be permitted to submit written statements. If they have additional questions, they will be submitted, and we will hold the record open for 5 business days to allow for that. And there being no further business, due to votes being called, we will stand adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 4:28 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

Material Submitted for the Record

SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128

Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere

Jeff Duncan (R-SC), Chairman

TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, to be held by the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere in Room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building (and available live on the Committee website at http://www.ForeignAffairs.house.gov):

DATE: Wednesday, June 24, 2015

TIME: 3:00 p.m.

SUBJECT: Colombia: Peace with the FARC?

WITNESSES: The Honorable Bernard Aronson
Special Envoy to the Colombian Peace Process
U.S. Department of State

Mr. Alex Lee
Deputy Assistant Secretary for South America and Cuba
Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs
U.S. Department of State

By Direction of the Chairman

The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202/225-5021 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

MINUTES OF SUBCOMMITTEE ON *Western Hemisphere* HEARING

Day *Wednesday* Date *June 24, 2015* Room *RHOB 2172*

Starting Time *3:00 p.m.* Ending Time *4:28 p.m.*

Recesses *0* (____to ____) (____to ____) (____to ____) (____to ____) (____to ____) (____to ____)

Presiding Member(s)

Chairman Jeff Duncan

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session [✓]
Executive (closed) Session [ ]
Televised [ ]

Electronically Recorded (taped) [✓]
Stenographic Record [✓]

TITLE OF HEARING:

Colombia: Peace with the FARC?

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Chairman Jeff Duncan; Rep. Albio Sires; Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen; Rep. Matt Salmon; Rep. Ted Yoho; Rep. Robin L. Kelly; Rep. Gregory Meeks; Rep. Alan Lowenthal

NON-SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: *(Mark with an * if they are not members of full committee.)*

Rep. Eliot Engel

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes [✓] No [ ]
(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: *(List any statements submitted for the record.)*

Statement for the Record from Congressman Lowenthal
QFRs from Congressman Lowenthal
Statement from Congressman Sam Farr

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE _____
or
TIME ADJOURNED *4:28 p.m.*

Mark O. Walker
Subcommittee Staff Director

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY THE HONORABLE JEFF DUNCAN, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA, AND CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE

MARCO RUBIO
FLORIDA

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

COMMITTEES:
COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION
FOREIGN RELATIONS
SELECT COMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE
SMALL BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

February 26, 2015

The Honorable Bernie Aronson
Special Envoy for the Colombia Peace Process
United States Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20220

Dear Special Envoy Aronson,

As you assume your responsibilities as the United States Special Envoy for Colombia Peace Process, it is important to recognize the outcome of the ongoing negotiations between the government of Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) could have serious and long lasting effect on the national security interest of the United States and Colombia.

Colombians have suffered for far too long as a result of the violence inflicted by the FARC, an organization considered a Foreign Terrorist Organization by the United States and the European Union. We should do all we can to ensure the ongoing negotiations and any potential outcomes do not weaken the integrity of our bilateral security efforts.

A hallmark of our security cooperation has been the extradition to the United States and conviction in United States courts of notorious drug traffickers and terrorists, including members of the FARC. During his December 2013 ambassadorial nomination, United States Ambassador Kevin Whitaker reaffirmed these efforts when he said that the United States would continue to seek access to individuals who are wanted to stand trial in the United States for very serious crimes.

Another major component of our security cooperation has been the utilization of aerial spraying to eliminate the cultivation of coca. This program, which targets areas currently outside the control of the Colombian government, allows the reduction of coca fields without placing large numbers of ground security forces in harm's way.

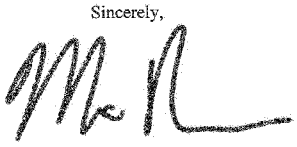
As you represent United States interest during the ongoing negotiations between the government of Colombia and the FARC, I ask you to:

- Reaffirm that the United States will not offer or accept the release of any person currently held in the United States, nor will the United States offer to or accept the transfer of said individuals to Colombia;

- Reaffirm that the United States will continue to seek access to individuals who are wanted to stand trial in the United States for violations of United States law;
- Reaffirm that the United States will continue to support aerial eradication of coca fields; and
- Provide regular updates to Congress on the status of the negotiations between the government of Colombia and (FARC) with an assessment of the impact that the negotiations will have on United States national security.

As you know, United States policy on the Western Hemisphere, especially in Colombia, is of great importance to me, my constituents in Florida and our nation's interests. I urge you to keep in mind the victims of actions taken by FARC and firmly commit to seeking out those criminals who are still wanted in Colombia as you assume your new duties.

Sincerely,



Marco Rubio
United States Senator

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY THE HONORABLE ALBIO SIRES, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF NEW JERSEY

Statement of Congressman Sam Farr

Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere hearing

"Colombia: Peace with the FARC?"

June 24, 2015

It is incredibly gratifying for me to be a part of these conversations about a possible peace in Colombia. For so many years now, every conversation about Colombia in this Congress has been focused, in one way or another, on war.

Unlike most of my colleagues, I have a personal connection with Colombia: I served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Medellín from 1964 until 1966. That experience changed my life, and I have remained engaged in issues related to Colombia since that time. I was very involved in the debate surrounding Plan Colombia, the enormous aid package granted to Colombia in the late 1990s. I was also deeply involved in the Colombia Free Trade Agreement.

I have been closely following the peace process and am pleased to see the progress made in the country in recent years. It is fair to say that Colombia is now in better shape than it has been in decades. Homicide rates are down; economic indicators are up. Colombia is the third largest country in this hemisphere, and it has incredible assets in its people, culture, and natural resources.

Of course, many challenges remain. A number of Members of Congress, including me, continue to monitor the labor rights situation in Colombia following the entry into force of the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement. Too many communities, particularly those of Afro-Colombians and in rural Colombia, have not been able to reap the benefits of economic growth and development and do not enjoy access to government services. And of course, the biggest obstacle of all to stability in the country remains unresolved: the conflict between the Colombian government and the guerrillas.

When I arrived in Medellín in 1964, this conflict was in its beginning stages. It's been difficult for friends of Colombia—like myself—to watch this conflict continue for so many decades. The human toll has been enormous, and the statistics are absolutely staggering: over 220,000 people have been killed. More than 5 million people have been forced from their homes, the second largest population of displaced persons in the world, only behind Syria. Thousands more have been kidnapped or disappeared. It is impossible to find a single person in Colombia that has not been touched by this war.

Attempts have been made in the past to bring an end to the conflict, but they have all failed to come to fruition. That is why, as I mentioned before, I am so pleased to see the progress that has been made over the course of the last two and a half years. The Colombian government and the FARC have reached preliminary agreements on three of the six negotiating agenda items. Getting this far has required a great deal of political will on the part of both sides.

I understand that the peace process is at a delicate stage. The fighting has intensified in the past few months and, after so many years of war, the public is understandably skeptical of attempts to end the conflict. The remaining items on the negotiation agenda are some of the most difficult.

And of course, if an agreement is reached, then the truly hard work begins. Demobilizing a guerrilla force that has been active for over 50 years will be no small feat. Extending the government's reach into previously ungoverned territories will be a long-term project. Dealing with human rights abuses and crimes committed during the war will be difficult and complex.

But let me be clear: in spite of the recent difficulties and the long road ahead, these negotiations are still the best chance for peace that Colombia has had in over five decades. In spite of all of the progress that Colombia has made in recent years, it is absolutely crucial to bring an end to this conflict so that Colombia can truly move on and realize its full potential.

Now is not the time to be questioning whether negotiations are the best path forward, or whether either side is committed to finding a solution. The answer to both of those questions is clearly "YES." The questions that we should be asking today are what the United States can do to help its longtime partner complete this process, and what we can do once an agreement is reached to help Colombia consolidate that peace.

The people of Colombia are ultimately in charge of their own future, but the United States must continue to be helpful as this process moves forward. The fact that President Juan Manuel Santos requested a more direct U.S. role in this process further demonstrates that we must step up to the plate to support our longtime partner. I look forward to hearing today from our witnesses about where the peace process stands and how the United States can aid that process.

Congressman Alan Lowenthal Statement

WHEM Hearing: Colombia: Peace with the FARC, Colombia's Peace Process: Statement, June 24, 2015

The most compelling argument for why we should support the Colombian peace talks is in this number: over 218,000 people have been killed in the Colombian conflict, and over 80 percent of them were civilians.[1] If the war continues, it's not the FARC guerrillas who will pay the main price. Nor is it the soldiers who signed up to serve their country. Nor is it the U.S. government, though we will keep paying the economic tab for Colombia's war. It is the children, women, men who live in the countryside of Colombia, many of them Afro-Colombian or indigenous, many of them poor, who will continue to be killed or forced to flee their homes because of the violence.

I'd also note that Colombia is second only to Syria in terms of numbers of internally displaced persons according to the report just released by UN High Commissioner on Refugees, with 6.4 million people displaced during the

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[1] This statistic is from *Basta Ya: Colombia, memorias de guerra y dignidad,* the July 2013 report of Colombia's National Historical Memory Center (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, CMH), which is a Colombian governmental body charged with collecting testimony and data on human rights violations in the context of the conflict. The statistic is only through 2012, so the total of those killed is somewhat higher today (likely around 222,000).

See this infographic on the costs of the war.

conflict. And that 137,000 people were displaced in 2014—so that even now, the war grinds on.

So I would like to commend the Colombian government for launching these talks, and support the State Department's efforts to bring home the peace. It's not easy, but it is the best outcome, and despite many obstacles to overcome, this is the closest Colombia has come to achieving peace in decades. It would be a real tragedy if Colombia was to lose this chance for peace, and have to face another decade of brutal conflict. I'd like to send a message to both sides at the negotiating table: Keep at it. Close the deal.

And I'd encourage the Colombian government to keep trying to launch talks with the ELN, Colombia's remaining guerrilla group. Only when all the illegal armed actors are demobilized will Colombia see real peace.

When the U.S. government began supporting the Colombian government with Plan Colombia in 2000, we didn't sign up for supporting endless war. The goal was to help Colombia improve counternarcotics efforts and achieve an end to the conflict. Now we have that chance. It only makes sense to take it.

Questions

1. **Of course, we would want the negotiated agreement to go as far as possible in achieving a sustainable peace. For that, it is important that the final agreement, to the extent that is possible, satisfy the demands of victims—victims of all armed actors, of the guerrillas, the paramilitaries and Colombia's armed forces—for truth, for justice, for reparations, and for guarantees that the brutal past will not be repeated. How is the State Department encouraging attention to the rights of victims of violence as the negotiations proceed?**

2. **Peace isn't achieved just by signing a paper accord. The first few years after a peace accord is signed are critical in consolidating a lasting peace. What should the United States be preparing to do, in terms of assistance for peace accord implementation, and also in terms of using diplomacy to encourage the accords to be fulfilled by both parties?**

Questions for the Record Submitted to
Deputy Assistant Secretary Alex Lee by
Representative Alan Lowenthal (1)
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
June 24, 2015

Question:
Of course, we would want the negotiated agreement to go as far as possible in achieving a sustainable peace. For that, it is important that the final agreement, to the extent that is possible, satisfy the demands of victims—victims of all armed actors, of the guerrillas, the paramilitaries and Colombia's armed forces—for truth, for justice, for reparations, and for guarantees that the brutal past will not be repeated. How is the State Department encouraging attention to the rights of victims of violence as the negotiations proceed?

Answer:
The Colombian government has registered more than 7.4 million victims. Victims, and their rights, are a central element in the peace process, and the issue is one of five formal agenda items in the negotiations. Reflecting the issue's importance, the parties have invited over 60 victim representatives to Havana to meet with the peace negotiators.

We welcome President Santos' commitment to prioritize victims in the peace process. We also support his call for the "maximum amount of justice possible" for conflict-related abuses as part of a peace agreement. Accountability, truth, reparation, and other guarantees of non-recurrence will be important components of a successful peace agreement.

The United States has consistently emphasized the importance of incorporating a transitional justice process in any Colombian peace agreement, which will ensure that Colombia can meet its international obligations in relation to justice and accountability. As Secretary Kerry has said, we support Colombia's efforts to achieve a peace that is "lasting and just."

The United States has also provided support to marginalized groups that have suffered disproportionately from the armed conflict; strengthened the Colombian government's efforts on the reintegration of demobilized ex-combatants and former child soldiers; and supported the Colombian government's efforts to address longstanding grievances and advance reconciliation.

The National Protection Unit, which we support, is currently assisting more than nine thousand Colombians to date in response to ongoing threats. Our programming to help Afro-Colombian communities has leveraged more than $300 million in Colombian government investments. More than 84,500 hectares of land have been returned to almost 11,500 displaced people as of December 2014. We also continue to support the Colombian government's implementation of its 2011 Victims Law, which we would expect to continue after any peace agreement was signed.

Questions for the Record Submitted to
Deputy Assistant Secretary Alex Lee by
Representative Alan Lowenthal (2)
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
June 24, 2015

Question:
Peace isn't achieved just by signing a paper accord. The first few years after a peace accord is signed are critical in consolidating a lasting peace. What should the United States be preparing to do, in terms of assistance for peace accord implementation, and also in terms of using diplomacy to encourage the accords to be fulfilled by both parties?

Answer:
The United States continues to reaffirm its support for the Colombian government's effort to secure a negotiated peace. The visits of Vice President Biden, Secretary Kerry, and Deputy Secretary Blinken during the last year have emphasized our commitment. Remarks by members of the U.S. Congress have been helpful as well. Continued statements of support by leaders in the U.S. government and the international community, including from international organizations, are very important to encourage the Colombian government to redouble its efforts to negotiate a just, lasting peace agreement. .

We have not received a formal request for assistance implementing a peace agreement, though the Colombian government has expressed an interest in continued U.S. support in the event of a post-conflict scenario. We have stated we will stand with Colombia in peace as we have in war. Flexibility in the formulation and delivery of U.S. foreign assistance will be important to allow us to respond to a future request from the Colombian government. Our programs supporting justice, reconciliation and human rights have already helped lay the groundwork for peace.

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY THE HONORABLE ELIOT L. ENGEL, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF NEW YORK

PUBLIC DECLARATION

The Afro-Colombian National Peace Council (CONPA), made up of the Afro-Colombian National Authority, the Association of Displaced Afro-Colombian s AFRODES, the Interethnic Solidarity Forum Choco FISCH, the National Network of Women KAMBIRI, Afro-Colombian Pastoral Centre CEPAC, the Association of Community Councils of Northern Cauca ACONC, the Afro-Colombian Labor Council CLAF, the Black Communities Process PCN, and the National Conference of Afro-Colombian Organizations CNOA, deeply concerned about the humanitarian situation and the negotiations between the National Government and the FARC (Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia), expresses that:

For us, the only solution to the armed conflict being waged in our country is a negotiated solution, and as such we ratify our support to the current peace process between the FARC and the National Government, and we urge the public phase of the negotiations with the ELN (National Liberation Army) be initiated.

The social and armed conflict that has been underway in Colombia for more than five decades, has substantially affected our people, deepening historical exclusion; undermining autonomy, the right to participation and to prior consultation; limiting the right to territory; creating conditions for increased precarious work in the receiving cities for the displaced; and subjecting Black people to a social and humanitarian crisis without precedents in the history of the country. The current escalation of the confrontation in our communities is generating displacement, confinement, persecution and stigmatization of Afro-Colombian leaders by the public forces and the FARC, the contamination of rivers and streams, the destruction of community infrastructure, etc, as a result of the continuous attacks by the groups in conflict.

The agreements and debates in Havana do not consider the ethnic and differential perspectives of our peoples. Therefore:

-We call for the immediate adoption of humanitarian accords which leaves our territories, communities and rights out of the confrontation

-The immediate adoption of protective measures for Afro-Colombian leaders that are threatened or at risk

-We demand a bilateral ceasefire

-We request that the parties receive a delegation made up of the Afro-Colombian , Black, Palenquero and Raizal people

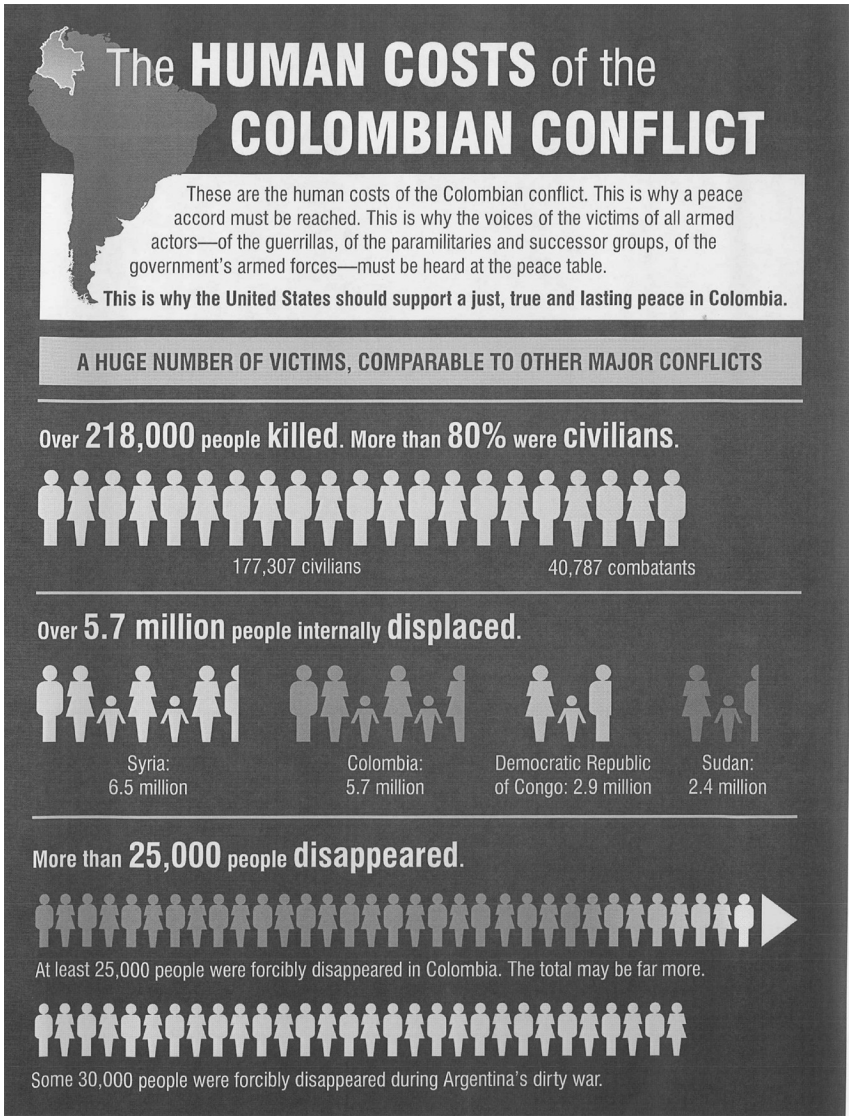
-We petition that a sub-commission be established that jointly addresses, with the Indigenous, Afro-Colombian-Black-Raizal, and Rom Peoples, the guarantee of rights in the agreements and in the implementation of them.

Given the humanitarian situation experienced in many of our territories, CONPA will work towards carrying out a Humanitarian Mission to Tumaco, and visits of accompaniment to other communities, for which we request the collaboration of the Ombudsperson, as well as United Nations and other humanitarian organizations that are present in the country.

Based on the above, the Organizations of Black Communities that make up CONPA, will continue developing the relevant actions to achieve a space for participation at the negotiating table, that will support the inclusion of our aspirations and that guarantee historical reparations for the Afro-Colombian people in post-conflict.

Bogota, 18 June 2015

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY THE HONORABLE ELIOT L. ENGEL, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF NEW YORK



ATTACKS ON VICTIMS COME FROM ALL QUARTERS: GUERRILLAS, PARAMILITARIES, GOVERNMENT ARMED FORCES

More than 27,000 people have been kidnapped, mainly by guerrillas.

Guerrillas kidnapped 25,482; Paramilitary groups kidnapped 2,541

More than 11,700 people killed in 1,982 massacres largely perpetrated by paramilitary groups.

Number of massacres committed by each group

Paramilitaries: 1166

Guerrillas: 343

Government's armed forces: 158

Unidentified armed groups: 295

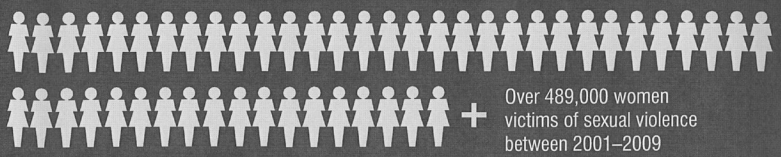
Paramilitaries with other groups: 20

4,200 civilians killed, allegedly by government forces, many just to increase the army's body count.

The civilian justice system is investigating over 4,200 such extrajudicial killings.

The military system is investigating unknown numbers of additional cases.

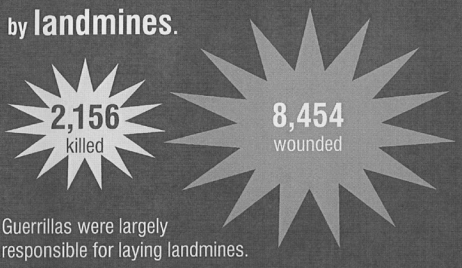
Countless women suffered sexual violence. No one knows how many.



Over 489,000 women victims of sexual violence between 2001–2009

(Estimate by the Campaign against Rape and other Sexual Violence)

10,610 people killed or wounded by landmines.



Guerrillas were largely responsible for laying landmines.

Almost 3,000 union members assassinated.

Paramilitaries were largely responsible.

THE CONFLICT RAGES AS PEACE IS BEING NEGOTIATED

- Over 256,000 people newly displaced in 2012.
- More than 16,800 people displaced in mass displacements in 2013. Of those, 73 percent were Afro-Colombian or indigenous.
- 359 people wounded or killed by landmines in 2013.
- 169 people were registered as forcibly disappeared in 2013. Of those, 10 were found dead; 36 were found alive; 123 remain missing.
- 26 union members assassinated in 2013.
- 78 human rights defenders assassinated in 2013.

By Lisa Haugaard

Sources

Many of the statistics used here are from *Basta Ya: Colombia, memorias de guerra y dignidad*, the July 2013 report of Colombia's National Historical Memory Center (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, CMH), which is a Colombian governmental body charged with collecting testimony and data on human rights violations in the context of the conflict. Originally set up in the aftermath of the 2005 paramilitary demobilization, its mission was broadened by the 2011 Victims' and Land Restitution Law. Its statistical analysis primarily draws from the government's Unified Registry of Victims and other governmental sources.

The CMH statistics are not the final word on the impact of the war. Certain statistics seem underestimated, such as sexual violence, and the statistics do not adequately cover extrajudicial executions allegedly committed by members of Colombia's armed forces. However, the statistics give a chilling sense of the human toll of Colombia's conflict. http://www.centrodememoriahistorica.gov.co/micrositios/informeGeneral/estadisticas.html

1. **People killed during the conflict.** The figures of those killed from 1958 through 2012 and the estimated percentage of those who are civilians are from the CMH. The CMH used the number of those civilians killed from the government's Unified Victims' Registry, which begins in 1985; and added its count of civilians killed from 1958-1984 and combatants killed from 1958-2012.

2. **Internally displaced.** In Colombia, people are displaced by threats from and conflict among all armed actors (paramilitaries and successor groups, guerrillas and the government's armed forces). Internally displaced persons are predominantly woman and children and disproportionally Afro-Colombian and indigenous. The figure for persons internally displaced in Colombia's from 1985 through 2012 is from the CMH. The Colombian government's Unified Victims' Registry cites 5,185,406 people internally displaced as of December 1, 2013, and the nongovernmental Consultancy on Human Rights and Displacement (CODHES) registers 5,701,996 as of May 31, 2013. The comparative global figures are from the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, Global Overview 2014: People Internally Displaced by Violence and Conflict, http://www.internal-displacement.org/assets/publications/2014/201405-global-overview-2014-en.pdf .

3. **Forced disappearances.** The figure of 25,007 forced disappearances from 1985 through 2012 is cited by the CMH and drawn from the Unified Victims' Registry. The Colombian government's National Registry of Missing Persons (*Registro Nacional de Desaparecidos*) registers over 81,000 missing persons, out of which it estimates over 19,500 cases meet the definition of forced disappearances; associations of families of the disappeared and human rights experts suggest that many more could be forced disappearances. By comparison, estimates for forced disappearances during Argentina's dirty war range from 8,960 registered in the Nunca Mas report by the National Commission on Disappeared Persons (CONADEP), http://www.desaparecidos.org/nuncamas/web/english/library/nevagain/nevagain_209.htm, to 30,000 generally estimated by Argentina's Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo and other human rights groups.

4. **Extrajudicial executions.** Human Rights Watch's *World Report 2014* notes that, "as of June 2013, the Human Rights Unit of the Attorney General's Office had been assigned investigations into 2,278 cases of alleged unlawful killings by state agents involving nearly 4,000 victims, and had obtained convictions for 189 cases." http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2014/country-chapters/colombia?page=2 In early 2014 the Attorney General's office stated it is investigating cases involving 4200 victims. Many additional cases are being pursued in the regional offices of the Attorney General's offices and unknown numbers of other cases remain in the military justice system.

5. **Kidnappings.** Figures for kidnappings in the context of the armed conflict from 1970 to 2010 are from the CMH. This number excludes kidnappings by criminal groups unrelated to the armed conflict.

6. **Massacres.** These statistics are from the CMH.

7. **Rape and other forms of sexual violence.** These crimes are largely unreported. While the CMH cites the figure from the Unified Victims' Registry of 1,754 victims of sexual violence from 1985 through 2012, an extremely low figure, a survey by the Campaign on Rape and Other Violence conducted a survey of women between ages 15 and 44 living in 407 municipalities under conflict during 2001-2009 and identified that 17.58 percent of the sample of women surveyed had experienced some form of sexual violence. The study then estimated that over 489,000 women in those municipalities had likely experienced some form of sexual violence. http://www.usofficeoncolombia.org/uploads/application-pdf/2011-03-23-Report-English.pdf

8. **Landmines.** These figures from 1990 through 2013 are from the Presidential Program on Integral Attention against Anti-Personnel Mines (*Programa Presidencial de Atencion Integral contra Minas Anti-personal*). http://www.accioncontraminas.gov.co/Paginas/victimas.aspx

9. **Assassination of union members.** The figures are from the nongovernmental National Labor School (Escuela Nacional Sindical); the total is from 1986 through 2013.

10. **The conflict continues.** The nongovernmental group CODHES cites 256,590 people newly displaced in 2012. The government recognized 171,841 newly displaced persons. However, according to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, "the government's reporting was significantly delayed by its transition from a database exclusive to IDPs to a comprehensive vcitims' registry, and the switch also explains some of the discrepancy between the two numbers. The government figure will undoubtedly increase once it has addresses a large backlog of IDPs who have up to four years to register following their displacement." (http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004CE90B/%28httpCountrySummaries%29/10FC2E0B838F2723C1257C62003483 31?OpenDocument&count=10000). Figures on mass displacements for 2013 and breakdown of those affecting ethnic minorities are from the UN Office of Humanitarian Affairs, 14 August 2013, cited in IDMC report, above. The 2013 figures on forcible disappearances are from the Colombian government's National Forensic Institute (*Instituto Nacional de Medicina Legal y Ciencias Forenses*), from the SIRDEC database. Figures on union members assassinated are from the National Labor School (http://www.ens.org.co/index.shtml?apc=Na--;1;-;-;&x=20168317), and figures on human rights defenders assassinated are from the nongovernmental program We are Defenders (*Somos Defensores*). http://www.somosdefensores.org/index.php/extensions/ultimas-noticias/421-informe-siaddhh-2013-d-de-defensa

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MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY THE HONORABLE ELIOT L. ENGEL, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF NEW YORK

May 18, 2015

Dear President Obama and Members of the U.S. Congress,

As leaders of a broad range of faith-based organizations and religious communities across the entire United States, we are greatly encouraged by the advances in the Colombian peace process. We are heartened by the recent agreements of the negotiating parties to remove land mines and to account for the disappeared, by actions from both parties to reduce ongoing conflict, and by the willingness of the negotiating parties to listen to a dramatic range of courageous victims of violence by all armed actors. Now, more than ever, we are convinced that this process offers an historic opportunity to end a conflict that has displaced more than 6 million women, men and children, disappeared over 25,000 and killed more than 220,000 people, over eighty percent of whom were civilians.

We deeply value the Obama Administration's increasing signs of support for the Colombian peace negotiations, including the appointment of a special envoy to the peace process and Vice President Biden's 2014 visit highlighting the negotiations and the rights of victims of the conflict. We appeal to all members of the U.S. Congress to join in a bipartisan support for peace and to commit to accompany Colombians of all walks of life as they seek to implement peace with truth and justice.

As the peace process with the FARC guerrilla advances, we make an urgent appeal to the Colombian government and the ELN guerrillas to open serious negotiations and to the United States and international community to encourage this important step. Peace can only be fully achieved when all actors on the battlefield seek to end the conflict.

As we rejoice in advances for peace, we know that the road ahead is difficult. As some of our Colombian colleagues have told us, "there can be no true reconciliation if there are no processes: of forgiveness among enemies (Matthew 18:21-22), of carefully seeking the truth (Psalm 85:11), of restorative justice (Galatians 6:1), and repairing the great wounds resulting from more than 50 years of armed conflict." We urge the Administration and Congress to press the Colombian negotiators to incorporate the just demands of victims of all armed actors—victims of the guerrillas, paramilitaries and the Colombian armed forces—for truth, justice, meaningful and successfully implemented reparations, and guarantees that the brutal past will never be repeated. This challenge includes addressing the severe social and political exclusion of Colombia's poor and marginalized communities that contributed to fueling the conflict.

The United States government is speaking the words of peace--and that is most welcome. It is also critical that all of our actions and assistance support peace. Instead of military aid, assistance should be transformed to support peace accord implementation, address humanitarian needs, and strengthen civilian institutions. In a post-peace accord society, civilian justice and law enforcement institutions should replace the military in Colombia's countryside, and development efforts should be civilian-led. U.S. assistance should be increased to civil society organizations that can help build peace on the ground.

U.S. assistance should also focus on the safe and sustainable return of land for internally displaced persons and refugees. We urge the United States to advocate and provide funding for more effective

protection programs for returning communities, as well as for human rights defenders, union members, Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities, and political groups that may join the electoral process once peace is declared. U.S. aid and diplomacy should be used to ensure full implementation of the Labor Action Plan, signed prior to the free trade agreement; its commitments to protect trade unionists and encourage respect for labor rights are still largely unfulfilled.

U.S. funding should also support strong truth and justice mechanisms, as well as demobilization and reintegration programs, rehabilitation for child soldiers, programs for victims of sexual violence, land mine education and removal, support for families of the disappeared in the search for their relatives, and the continuation of a robust human rights program. The United States government can contribute to the quest to establish the truth about the conflict by issuing an inter-agency order to declassify U.S. documents for a truth commission.

Just as the parties to the conflict will be bound to respect the peace accords that emerge, so too should the international community act to uphold them. For the United States, that will include respecting the agreements that have been reached on rural and drug policy. This calls for a greater focus on small-scale, farmer-led rural development and for a focus on alternative development programs built with farmers' participation rather than aerial spraying programs, which destroy staple food crops and harm the environment and communities' health. This shift offers a more sustainable and effective approach to reduce illicit drug production and strengthen rural communities.

As well as developing peace-oriented assistance, there are other actions the United States can take to help Colombia build peace on the ground. The U.S. government can urge the Colombian government to dismantle paramilitary successor groups that continue to threaten and harm rural and urban communities. This includes investigating and prosecuting those members of the Colombian armed forces, police, civilian authorities, landowners and businesses that continue to aid, abet and tolerate these brutal groups. Only when all the varied sources of violence are addressed can peace fully take root.

We wish to caution that as the peace process advances, threats and attacks against victims' representatives, land rights leaders, faith leaders, human rights defenders, Afro-Colombian and indigenous leaders, and peace advocates have increased. Now and following a peace accord, the United States must call on the Colombian government to denounce these threats and attacks, provide protection and, most importantly, ensure that these threats and attacks are promptly and effectively investigated and prosecuted. Peace can only be achieved when all Colombians can freely and safely exercise and express their rights.

Finally, we urge the United States to reaffirm the role of victims' associations, faith organizations, and civil society organizations in constructing peace. These organizations can and should play a vital role in implementing and monitoring peace accords, advancing reconciliation, assisting victims to rebuild their lives, reintegrating former combatants and rebuilding the societal fabric that war has torn asunder.

We urge the United States to embrace its moral obligations to help Colombia build a just and lasting peace.

Rev. Geoffrey A. Black
General Minister and President, United Church of Christ

Rev. Mamie Broadhurst
Co-Moderator, Colombia Mission Network of the PC (USA)

J Ron Byler
Executive Director, Mennonite Central Committee U.S.

Sister Simone Campbell
Executive Director, NETWORK- A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby

Patrick Carolan
Executive Director, Franciscan Action Network

Sr. Patricia Chappell
Executive Director, Pax Christi USA

Rev. Dr. John R. Deckenback
Conference Minister, Central Atlantic Conference of the United Church of Christ

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Presiding Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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Co-Executive Global Ministries, President, Division of Overseas Ministries

Gerry Lee
Director, Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

Dr. Eli S. McCarthy
Director of Justice and Peace, Conference of Major Superiors of Men

Reverend John L. McCullough
President and CEO, Church World Service

Rev. Dr. James Moos
Co-Executive Global Ministries, Executive Minister, Wider Church Ministries

Rev. Gradye Parsons
Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church (USA)

Fr. Antonio Ponce OMI
Director, Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation office

Diane E. Randall
Executive Secretary, Friends Committee on National Legislation

Rev. Angel L. Rivera-Agosto
Latin America Area Executive, Global Ministries UCC/DOC

Alan Robinson
National Director, Brethren in Christ Church in the U.S.

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Conference Minister, Connecticut Conference United Church of Christ

Sandra Sorensen
Director, Washington Office of the United Church of Christ

Jean Stokan
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Sarah Thompson
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General Minister and President, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Jim Winkler
General Secretary and President, National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA

Margot Worfolk
Board Chair, Chicago Religious Leadership Network on Latin America (CRLN)

Scott Wright
Executive Director, Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach

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