

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
Office of the Spokesman  
September 11, 2009

STATEMENT BY IAN KELLY, SPOKESMAN

Determination and Certification of Colombian Government and Armed Forces  
with Respect to Human Rights Related Conditions

On September 8, 2009, the Department of State determined and certified to Congress that the Colombian Government and Armed Forces are meeting statutory criteria related to human rights and paramilitary groups. This determination and certification, which is pursuant to Section 7046(b) of the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2009, permits the full balance of FY 2009 funds designated for assistance to the Colombian Armed Forces to be obligated.

There is no question that improvement must be made in certain areas; however, the Colombian government has made significant efforts to increase the security of its people and to promote respect for human rights by its Armed Forces and has thereby met the certification criteria. Years of reforms and training are leading to an increased respect for and understanding of human rights by most members of the Armed Forces. In addition, the Prosecutor General's Office has made significant advances in investigating and prosecuting human rights cases over the past few years. For example, over the last year the Prosecutor General's Office arrested several generals on human rights charges; charged five members of the Army's "La Popa" Battalion with collusion with paramilitary forces and the homicide of 20 civilians; sentenced seven soldiers in connection with the murder of a member of the San José Peace Community; and charged ten others in connection with the February 2005 massacre of eight members from that same community.

While these advances are positive, Colombia continues to face several disquieting challenges. Revelations of extrajudicial killings are evidence that the Armed Forces' far reaching reforms have not fully taken hold. Both the Armed Forces and Prosecutor General's Office were swift to take action following revelations of the 2008 Soacha murders by dismissing 51 members of the Armed Forces and opening investigations of 75 soldiers. However, the Soacha case is not an isolated incident and additional actions will require firm leadership by the Armed Forces to resolve and eliminate abuses, and enhance cooperation with the Prosecutor General's Office to hold perpetrators accountable.

Allegations of illegal domestic wiretapping and surveillance by Colombia's Department of Administrative Security (DAS) are troubling and unacceptable. The importance that the Prosecutor General's Office has placed on prosecuting these crimes is a positive step for Colombia, but media and NGO reports allege that illegal activity continues, so it is even more vital that the Colombian

government take steps to ensure that this is not the case, and that the Prosecutor General's Office conduct a rigorous, thorough and independent investigation in order to determine the extent of these abuses and to hold all perpetrators accountable.

The United States remains concerned by both extrajudicial killings and the allegations against the DAS, and will continue to push for improvements in Colombia's human rights situation, and to underscore the importance we place on this issue. We are committed to taking a number of steps that will encourage continued improvements in the Armed Forces' respect for human rights; enhance the investigation and prosecution capabilities of the Prosecutor General's Office; foster constructive dialogue between the Colombian government and civil society groups; and show support for independent and swift investigations into the DAS scandal. Throughout this process, we will continue - both in Washington and through the U.S. Embassy in Bogotá - to engage with and benefit from the individual expertise of Colombian and international human rights groups, as well as civil society, with regard to Colombia's human rights performance. We appreciate the commitment of these groups to the continued improvement of the human rights situation in Colombia and applaud their often dangerous work.

(end text)

(Distributed by the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>)