



Ambassador Colin Martin-Reynolds CMG
British Embassy
Carrera 9, No 76-49
8th Floor, ING Barings Building
Bogota
Colombia

6 July 2020

Dear Ambassador,

We are writing in response to the concerns raised in a letter signed by more than fifty members of the Colombian congress over the presence of United States military personnel in Colombia.

As the Cundinamarca Administrative Tribunal has ruled, the Colombian Constitution specifies that congressional approval must be granted for foreign military personnel to enter Colombian sovereign territory. In this case, however, approval was neither sought nor granted. We also note that the letter questioned why the US embassy in Colombia, rather than the Colombian government, had announced the deployment.

The impact of drugs trafficking continues to damage the lives of many communities in Colombia and elsewhere and we are aware that Colombia continues to be the world's largest producer of coca. The 2016 peace agreement stipulates for an approach to coca eradication that does not criminalise the coca farmer but rather recognises the socio-economic causes and solutions to the problem. It is therefore imperative that all efforts are made to fully implement the 2016 peace agreement, which prioritises mutually-agreed manual crop substitution. We know that the re-grow rate for families involved in these programmes is below five per cent and that, as such, this is the most sustainable approach.

We are concerned that Colombian security forces continue to forcibly remove crops in apparent contravention of the terms of the peace agreement, with the army reported to have killed two peasant farmers protesting forced eradication. The arrival of US personnel appears a further departure from the terms of the peace agreement, which recognises that coca-growing regions urgently require an increased civilian state presence. This becomes even more pertinent given recent concerns over the Colombian military's conduct after it was revealed that it has been spying on opposition politicians, trade unionists and journalists.

Furthermore, given the ongoing hostility of the United States towards Venezuela, the presence of US troops close to Colombia's border with Venezuela threatens to exacerbate tensions. This

raises fears of potentially dire consequences for regional stability, including the peace process. We believe that the international community must work to reduce tensions, yet this action will produce the opposite effect.

We are aware of the commitment of the British Government and the work carried out by the British Embassy in Colombia in support of peace in Colombia and we would like to take this opportunity to give recognition to those efforts. Particularly given Britain's important role in Colombia as penholder to the UN Security Council resolution on the peace agreement, we hope you will continue to advocate for its full implementation, as well as make representations to the Colombian government over its responsibilities and, particularly, in relation to support for voluntary crop substitution programmes.

Signed:



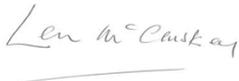
Frances O'Grady, General Secretary, TUC



Mick Whelan, General Secretary, ASLEF; Chair, Justice for Colombia



Dave Ward, General Secretary, CWU



Len McCluskey, General Secretary, Unite the Union