

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 5, 2014

The Honorable John Kerry
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry:

We write to express our deep concern with the grave human rights situation in Buenaventura and Tumaco, two cities on Colombia's Pacific Coast with large Afro-Colombian populations. We urge you to ensure the Colombian government is meeting human rights conditions to receive U.S. military aid by taking all the necessary steps to end atrocities in these cities and to bring those responsible to justice.

We are troubled with the extraordinary levels of violence and impunity in the port city of Buenaventura, where the population is more than 80% Afro-Colombian. According to a Human Rights Watch report released in March, criminal gangs that descended from paramilitaries are routinely committing serious abuses in Buenaventura, including abducting and dismembering their victims, sometimes while they are still alive, in so-called "chop-up houses." Women and girls suffer sexual violence, while young children live under constant pressure and threats to join these groups.

We have learned that for the past three years Buenaventura has led all Colombian municipalities in the numbers of newly displaced persons. For instance, last year's violence alone drove more than 31,000 Buenaventura residents from their homes, according to government data. Many of these victims were Afro-Colombians from the poorest and most marginalized sectors of the city.

The situation is also dire in Tumaco, where the population is 89% Afro-Colombian. Last year more than 13,000 Tumaco residents were forcibly displaced, second only to Buenaventura. This July, Human Rights Watch published a report documenting widespread abuses committed by the FARC in Tumaco in 2013 and 2014, including killings, disappearances, kidnapping, torture, forced recruitment, and planting landmines. Paramilitary successor groups have also been responsible for rampant killings in Tumaco in recent years. Impunity is the norm for these abuses: of prosecutors' investigations into more than 1,300 homicides committed in Tumaco since 2009, only seven have led to a conviction.

As you know, a portion of U.S. military aid to Colombia is conditioned on the government's respect of Afro-Colombian communities' rights. For this reason, the situation in Buenaventura and Tumaco is of particular interest for Congress. It is our government's responsibility to ensure aid is properly allocated, and that recipients are in compliance with established policies. Judging by credible reports by organizations such as Human Rights Watch and others, we can conclude that Colombia is not in full compliance with these policies as its government is failing to protect the rights of Afro-Colombian communities in Buenaventura and Tumaco.

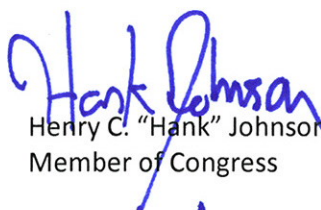
In April the Colombian government announced the implementation of measures to increase social investment and strengthen judicial investigations in Buenaventura. While we are encouraged by

this announcement, it is very concerning that several more dismembered bodies were found in Buenaventura since it was made. We are of the opinion that immediate action should be taken to stop the human rights crises in Tumaco and Buenaventura, including by taking all necessary steps to stop the abuses and hold the perpetrators accountable. In addition, the Colombian government should formulate and implement an emergency plan to address the extreme poverty and social exclusion affecting much of Buenaventura and Tumaco's populations.


We urge you to ensure the Colombian government is meeting the conditions to receive U.S. military aid by closely monitoring the situation in Buenaventura and Tumaco. We also urge you to call upon the Colombian government to adopt urgent measures to stop ongoing violence, protect the cities' residents, and effectively investigate and prosecute those responsible for atrocities there.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

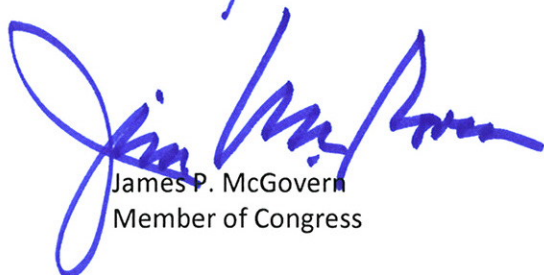
Sincerely,



Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.
Member of Congress



John Lewis
Member of Congress



James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



Sam Farr
Member of Congress



John Conyers, Jr.
Member of Congress



Barbara Lee
Member of Congress



George Miller
Member of Congress



Emanuel Cleaver II
Member of Congress