

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 28, 2023

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary
Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken,

As supporters of human rights in Colombia, we are deeply concerned by the ongoing political violence – including selective killings and massacres in rural areas – in the post-peace agreement era. We are particularly troubled by the killing of 11 individuals in the town of Alto Remanso on March 28th, 2022 by a Colombian security force unit that has received U.S. security assistance.

At the time, Colombian military officials claimed that all those killed in Remanso were members of the illegal armed group *Comandos de la Frontera* (Border Command). This version of events immediately conflicted with testimonies by local witnesses – collected by human rights organizations and respected Colombian journalists – which pointed toward at least four of those killed being unarmed civilians. Press investigations revealed compelling evidence that the military attempted to manipulate the scene of the killings, dressing the corpses of those civilians with military gear and weapons. This allegation echoes the modus operandi of Colombia’s ‘false positives’ scandal.

According to Colombian press outlet *Semana*¹, the operation was executed by the 3rd Counternarcotics Battalion, which is part of the Command Against Narcotrafficking and Transnational Threats (CONAT). In a September 14, 2021 press interview, CONAT Commander Army Brigadier General Juan Carlos Correa Consuegra stated that, “We have a long-standing friendship and partnership with the United States. The United States continues supporting us in training and equipment, which helps us to strengthen our distinctive CONAT capabilities.”²

1 *Semana Magazine*, “Exclusivo: la versión no contada de la operación militar en Putumayo, donde murieron 11 presuntos disidentes de las Farc” April 11, 2022 (<https://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/exclusivo-esta-es-la-version-no-contada-de-la-operacion-militar-en-el-putumayo-donde-murieron-11-presuntos-disidentes-de-las-farc/202209/>)

2 Cook, Geraldine, “CONAT, Elite Command in the Fight Against Narcotrafficking” *Diálogo Americas* September 14, 2021 (<https://dialogo-americas.com/articles/conat-elite-command-in-the-fight-against-narcotrafficking/#.Y9nyF-zMKrN>)

On the eve of the Alto Remanso massacre's solemn anniversary, we understand the civilian investigation has made little if any progress. A community activist from Puerto Leguizamo stated in a November 28th, 2022 public hearing before the Colombian congress that she has heard nothing from Colombia's Attorney General (*Fiscal de la Nación*) about the case. In a private statement to Amazon Watch, the activist elaborated, "We are demanding that the Colombian State and the Attorney General show results from the investigation into the massacre in Remanso. Following the massacre we don't know anything about how the investigation is going or who was responsible. We are demanding that the Colombian State and the international community help us clarify these violent acts against the people of Puerto Leguizamo."

A recent article in Colombia's El Espectador outlet concludes that, "To date, neither the Attorney General's Office nor the Inspector General's Office (*Procuraduría*) have announced any progress in their investigations."³

During a House Foreign Affairs Committee hearing on April 28, 2022, you testified: "We take this [the Alto Remanso massacre] very seriously and of course we will look into any allegations. We are very serious about the Leahy vetting process that we have committed resources to again in our budget to make sure that we have the means to always carry those forward and if there are credible allegations, we will look into them. And if we find that the allegations have substance, we will take action."

Due to the many unresolved issues surrounding the Alto Remanso massacre, we request your response to the following questions:

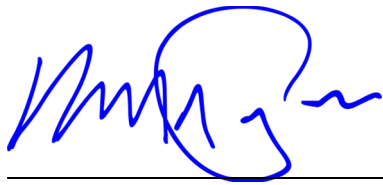
1. What is the State Department's assessment of the current status of the civilian investigation into the Alto Remanso massacre of March 28, 2022?
2. What is the history of the relationship between the U.S. military and the 3rd Counternarcotics Battalion in particular and the Command Against Narcotrafficking and Transnational Threats (CONAT) in general?
3. What support have those units received from the U.S. since March 28th, 2022?
4. What is the State Department's assessment of whether Colombian military units carried out gross violations of human rights, such as extrajudicial killings, in Alto Remanso?
5. Has the government of Colombia taken effective steps to bring responsible members of the security forces to justice in the case of Alto Remanso?

3 Morales Sierra, Felipe "Los papeles secretos de la cuestionada operación militar en Putumayo" El Espectador January 31, 2023 (<https://www.elespectador.com/judicial/los-papeles-secretos-de-la-cuestionada-operacion-militar-en-putumayo/>)

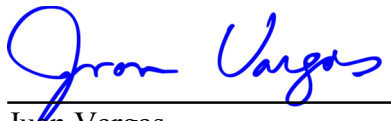
6. Has the Leahy Law been applied in this case? If not, please detail how this case does not meet Leahy criteria.

We greatly appreciate your response to these inquiries. Thank you in advance for your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,



Mark Pocan
Member of Congress



Juan Vargas
Member of Congress



Ilhan Omar
Member of Congress



James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



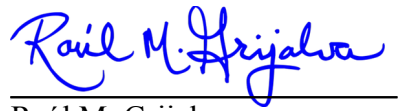
Joaquin Castro
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Barbara Lee
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