

APRIL 21, 2002

**SCHAKOWSKY JOINS THOUSANDS TO PROTEST U.S. POLICY ON COLOMBIA**

WASHINGTON, D.C. - During a rally with thousands of students, advocates, religious leaders and public officials, U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) today said, *"We are facing a human rights emergency in Colombia and the Bush Administration, the Republicans in the Congress and the SOA are adding to it."*

□ Thousands gathered on the grounds of the Washington Monument to protest present U.S. policy on Colombia and to criticize the Bush Administration's proposal that could escalate that country's civil war which has already claimed more than 40,000 lives and resulted in the displacement of more than 2 million Colombians.

Below is the text of Schakowsky's speech:

**Hello Mobilization 2002! □ Buenas Tardes! □ Me Alegro Estar con ustedes Hoy. □**

**I'm Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky from Illinois. I have stood with many of you before at Fort Benning and in Colombia, and I am proud to be here with you today in Washington, DC! □ □**

**It's an honor to be here and I want to thank all of you who worked to put this important event together, every organization involved in this effort for being here, and for the important work you do every day.**

**One thing I have learned in the time I've spent in Congress is that without your work and dedication the real facts about what's happening in Colombia, our government's role in the conflict, and the cover-up at the School of the Americas wouldn't even be on the radar screen of the Congress, or the White House. □ You've exposed the hidden, and often ugly, truths. □**

**Without your work, there wouldn't be any limit to what goes on at the SOA. Without your work, SOA graduates in countries like Colombia would do even more harm. □ Without your work, many more innocent lives would be lost. So my main message to you today is thank you for your courage and dedication. Keep it up and I will be with you every step of the way. □**

**Last year I traveled to Colombia, the SOA's number one customer. □ On that trip, I met with hundreds of Colombians and traveled all over the country.**

**On that trip I met with mothers who lost children, children without parents, families who lost their homes and farmers whose legal crops were destroyed. □ □**

**I met with communities of peace, innocent people who want nothing more than to live their lives without fear, to raise their children and grow their crops.[] []**

**Their stories were moving and heart-breaking.**

**I heard chilling accounts of massacres, kidnappings, torture, and intimidation. That is the tragedy U.S. policy has aggravated in Colombia.**

**And President Bush is making it even worse.**

**We know that this type of violence is systematic in Colombia.[] Last year, there was at least one massacre a day in Colombia, leaving thousands of innocent people murdered, Over 2 million displaced, and thousands of others kidnapped or disappeared.**

**We are facing a human rights emergency in Colombia and Bush Administration, the Republicans in the Congress and the SOA are adding to it.[]**

**They say they want to stop the conflict and the flow of drugs, and to eradicate coca.[] But the more time and money we spend in Colombia, the worse the situation gets.[] More innocent people are killed, drugs are everywhere in this country and according to the CIA, Coca growth has gone up again this year.**

**As long as the demand remains in the U.S., our policy of coca eradication in Colombia just serves as a great price support.[]**

**Our policies have increased coca production and are prolonging the violence.[] The Administration should obey the first rule of holes-when you find yourself in one, STOP DIGGING!**

**Given the spectacular failure of our counter narcotics efforts, any rational person would consider a change of course, the Bush Administration wants to do more of the same-as though it might produce a different result.**

**With a third of all Colombians living on less than a dollar a day, they will never run out of desperate campesinos willing to grow illicit crops.[] And if that isn't bad enough, the Republicans want to cut what little money there is for alternative crop development.[]**

**Instead, they want to spend billions more of your tax dollars to give guns, bombs, and helicopters to the Colombian military.[] Are you going to let that happen without a fight?[]**

**No, because we know what the Bush Administration won't admit: funding more prisons, spray planes, and helicopters to solve the problem of drug addiction is like digging more graves to solve the international AIDS crisis-it solves NOTHING!**

**Now the Administration wants permission to change the plan.[] They want to shift form**

**counter-narcotics to counter-insurgency. Back in 1999, when Congress first considered the military package for Colombia, I warned it would be the first in a series of blank checks in war with no endgame. Mission creep has turned into mission gallop!**

**Are we going to let the dinosaurs of the cold war and the ghosts of El Salvador dictate our policy in Colombia?**

**Are we going to let them have it their way in Colombia?**

**Over 10, 000 Colombian soldiers have been trained at the SOA, and we know what that means. Colombia's military has committed atrocities against the very people it is supposed to protect. Their brothers and sisters.**

**Which makes me wonder, is Plan Colombia really about strengthening democracy?**

**Are the people in the White House really committed to international democracy and human rights? You know the answer. It's NO!**

**We saw last week what they think of democracy as they cheered the military coup that deposed the Democratically elected President of Venezuela, Hugo Chavez.**

**The legacy of our Colombia policy is a legacy of death, shame, and abuse.**

**You know, most members of Congress and the White House think that there will always be an SOA. They think that they can get away with a facelift and a press release and they'll be able to get rid of you. They think they can continue with business as usual in Colombia and you will eventually quit.**

**Well, are they right? Are we going to quit?**

**We're here to tell them NO, we're never going to quit!**

**Are we going to fight for a brighter, peaceful future for Colombia?**

**We want to help Colombia! And we're gonna keep fighting for the people of Colombia, Aren't We?**

**□**

**After this weekend, our work continues throughout the year. Coming here today is important, but what happens when we go home is critical.**

**When we leave here, we need to take this energy and determination with us to our families and our friends and to our representatives in the Congress. I look forward to working with all of you.**