

JANUARY 15, 2002

SCHAKOWSKY WARNS ADMINISTRATION AGAINST SHIFTING U.S. POLICY THAT WOULD ESCALATE CIVIL WAR IN COLOMBIA AND DESTROY PEACE PROCESS

WASHINGTON, D.C. -U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) today expressed strong opposition to a policy shift under consideration by the Bush Administration that could result in rapid escalation of the civil war in Colombia and the death of many more innocent victims. Officials in the Bush Administration have indicated that there may be an increase of U.S. military and counter-insurgency assistance to Colombia in the upcoming months.

Schakowsky said that this news is troubling since the Colombian government and the FARC have agreed to restart peace negotiations, and said that she plans to call for hearings on this policy in the National Security Subcommittee, on which she serves.

In a letter to President Bush, Schakowsky wrote, "Under the cloak of counter-narcotics assistance, we have provided military aid to Colombia's military, which has one of the worst human rights records in the world. I strongly object to a policy shift that would allow for the United States to get even more involved in Colombia's civil war. Opponents of Plan Colombia have warned of the lines between counter-narcotics and counter-insurgency being blurred. The shift you are reportedly considering would erase those lines entirely."

Schakowsky added that the Administration has lent "virtually no assistance to the peace negotiations in Colombia but seems eager to send more weapons of war to that country." She urged the Administration to work to advance the peace process, instead of "escalating a civil war and providing aid to a military still rife with corruption."

Schakowsky, who traveled to Colombia last year and met with President Pastrana, military officials, human rights experts and others, will continue to seek support for her legislation, the Andean Region Contractor Accountability Act, H.R. 1591, to prohibit the federal government from funding private armies in the Andean region. Schakowsky is a member of the Government Reform Subcommittees on National Security and Criminal Justice and Drug Policy.

January 15, 2002

*The Honorable George Walker Bush
President of the United States
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500*

Dear President Bush:

I am deeply concerned that your Administration, as reported in today's Washington Post, is considering a major shift in U.S. policy toward Colombia. The news is particularly troubling at a time when diplomatic efforts have successfully obtained commitments from the Colombian government and the FARC to restart peace negotiations.

Plan Colombia was sold to the American public and to Congress as a way to help reduce the flow of drugs to this country. It was promised to concerned members of Congress that this aid would not be used for counter-insurgency purposes. From the start, I have objected to that policy because it has failed to achieve its stated goals and because it did not include adequate controls on the use of US military resources.

Under the cloak of counter-narcotics assistance, we have provided military aid to Colombia's military, which has one of the worst human rights records in the world. I strongly object to a policy shift that would allow for the United States to get even more involved in Colombia's civil war. Opponents of Plan Colombia have warned of the lines between counter-narcotics and counter-insurgency being blurred. The shift you are reportedly considering would erase those lines entirely.

The U.S. should facilitate steps toward peace in Colombia, but I do not believe that escalating a civil war and providing aid to a military still rife with corruption is the way to accomplish that goal. Currently, adequate safeguards to ensure proper use of U.S. military aid exist only on paper, and I fear that additional U.S. military training and equipment may actually be used against the very people we are trying to protect. Moreover, I am troubled by the fact that your Administration has lent virtually no assistance to the peace negotiations in Colombia but seems eager to send more weapons of war to that country. I hope that you will not do so without the express consent of Congress.

Again, I urge you reconsider your plan to increase U.S. military and counter-insurgency assistance to Colombia.

Instead, I hope that you will aggressively support efforts to foster peace in that country.

Sincerely,

**Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress**