

**MARCH 2, 2001**

**SCHAKOWSKY'S STATEMENT ON PLAN COLOMBIA BEFORE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE, DRUG POLICY AND HUMAN RESOURCES**

**WASHINGTON, D.C. - Mr. Chairman, I recently had an opportunity to visit Colombia along with Congressman McGovern and a number of Congressional staff, journalists, and others on a trip that was organized by the Washington Office on Latin America. We had a very busy 6 days during which we had an opportunity to travel around Colombia and to meet with various sectors of society that are impacted by the current U.S. policy. In addition to meeting President Pastrana, the Minister of Defense, the Attorney General, the Head of the National Police, the head of the Colombian Army, and numerous other Colombian and U.S. officials, including Ambassador Patterson, we were able to hear testimony from hundreds of Colombian people. We heard from farmers and human rights workers in Putumayo. We met with non-governmental organizations like Peace Brigades International and ASFADES. We met with communities of displaced people living in poverty because of the violence in Colombia. We met with ambassadors from other countries and representatives from the United Nations, and we visited a peace community in San Jose de Apartado.**

**Mr. Chairman, as you know, during previous hearings in this subcommittee about U.S. aid to Colombia, I have raised numerous concerns: That U.S. aid to Colombia is too heavily weighted in helicopters and military hardware, instead of support for civil society, democratic institutions, and human rights defenders. I have shared with my colleagues my fear that U.S. military involvement in Colombia may actually escalate the current conflict in that country. I have stated on numerous occasions that our current policy toward Colombia and the billions of dollars we are poised to spend in addition to the over \$1 billion appropriated last year will not achieve the stated goal of reducing the flow of illegal drugs to the United States. I have called attention to the fact that dollar for dollar it is more effective to invest in treatment and prevention as opposed to interdiction and eradication at the source. I have also questioned whether the United States can be actively involved in counter-narcotics efforts in Colombia without being drawn into the violence that rages in that country.**

**Unfortunately, Mr. Chairman, my recent trip has only reinforced and added to many of the concerns I had before going to Colombia.**

**It is clear to me that collusion continues between the Colombian military and the paramilitary death squads in Colombia.**

**The Military has made ineffective and insufficient efforts to protect civilians who are targeted by paramilitary and guerrilla forces.**

**Our fumigation efforts in Putumayo may be causing health problems for the local**

population, including children. And, despite the embassy's enthusiasm about the accuracy of our spray planes, I heard testimony from farmers whose legal crops were destroyed-leaving them and their families without a source of income or food. Fortunately, Ambassador Patterson was with us in Putumayo and she agreed the concern warrants sending medical professionals there to do more research on the possible human and environmental effects of aerial fumigation.

There is a human rights emergency in Colombia. Peaceful civilians are harassed, robbed, and attacked on a daily basis. Entire communities have been displaced by the violence in Colombia and despite their dire situation and commitments by the U.S. and Colombian governments to help, there are hundreds of thousands of displaced Colombian people struggling to survive and failing to receive basic services.

The press in Colombia while uncensored by the government is censored by intimidation-numerous journalists have disappeared, been killed, or forced into exile.

While helicopters are on the way, fumigation is in full force, and U.S. military personnel are on the ground, desperately needed funds for those charged with protecting against and investigating human rights abuse are still being held up by the United States. While I was in Colombia there was a massacre in Cauca and the human rights unit of the Colombian prosecutor general's office did not even have the money to send investigators to the scene. The \$3 million dollars promised to the unit held up apparently because of a dispute between the State Department and the Department of Justice. The Human Rights division of the national police in Colombia has an operating budget of just \$140, 000-as you know Mr. Chairman, members of Congress earn more than that.

Clear violations of human rights remain unpunished even when evidence of the perpetrators exists. The Santo Domingo massacre that took place on December 23, 1998, during which 17 civilians including 6 children were murdered remains an unresolved case-despite extensive evidence of Colombian military involvement and a cover-up. And the Colombian Air Force unit and others implicated in the case remain cleared to receive U.S. military aid despite the fact that this appears to be a clear breach of the Leahy law.

A few days after I returned from Colombia, the State Department released its Human Rights Report and I want to read to my colleagues an exert from the section on Colombia.

*The Government's human rights record remained poor; there were some improvements in the legal framework and in institutional mechanisms, but implementation lagged, and serious problems remain in many areas. Government security forces continued to commit serious abuses, including extrajudicial killings. Despite some prosecutions and convictions, the authorities rarely brought higher-ranking officers of the security forces and the police charged with human rights offenses to justice, and impunity remains a problem. Members of the security forces collaborated with paramilitary groups that*

*committed abuses, in some instances allowing such groups to pass through roadblocks, sharing information, or providing them with supplies or ammunition. Despite increased government efforts to combat and capture members of paramilitary groups, often security forces failed to take action to prevent paramilitary attacks. Paramilitary forces find a ready support base within the military and police, as well as among local civilian elites in many areas.*

Now I know how my constituents feel about this situation. They want to help Colombia and the people there and so do I. And we want to deal with the drug problem in the U.S., but do not want to send hundreds of millions of dollars worth of military aid to an army that has been known to brutalize the same people it is supposed to protect.

What is even more troubling is that, despite the express will of Congress in attaching human rights conditions to the aid approved last year, the President saw it fit to waive those conditions- a decision that has sent a message to the Colombian military that they can keep doing what they are doing and U.S. aid will continue to pour in.

I want to mention one other concern:

Less than two weeks ago US citizens working for the private military contractor Dyncorp came under fire from FARC guerrillas. The privatization of our military and police assistance to Colombia raises important oversight questions as we get drawn deeper into Colombia's civil war.

The most obvious question is why do we need to outsource and privatize our efforts in Colombia? The American taxpayers already pay \$300 billion per year to fund the world's most powerful military. Why should they have to pay a second time in order to privatize our operations? Proponents of privatizing government functions argue that it will save taxpayers' money, but a February 23 Miami Herald article states that these private American pilots earn about \$90,000 a year while mechanics earn about \$60,000. Does it make sense to pay a private contractor to duplicate the capabilities of the world's most advanced military?

Or are we outsourcing to in order avoid public scrutiny, controversy or embarrassment? Is it to hide body bags from the media and thus shield them from public opinion? After all, three Dyncorp pilots have already died in crashes. Or is it to provide deniability because these private contractors (many of them former U.S. military personnel) are not covered by the same rules as active duty US service persons in Colombia? The Miami Herald article states, "DynCorp employees are under strict orders to avoid journalists" and that "DynCorp and MPRI officials said they could not comment on their operations in Colombia under the terms of their contracts with the U.S. government." If they will not talk to the press or to US citizens then where is the accountability? Are the terms of their contracts secret as well? How is the public to know what their tax dollars are being used for?

Going to war is one of the most grave decisions that we as a nation can make. If there is a potential for a privatized Gulf of Tonkin incident, then the American people deserve to have a full and open debate before this policy goes any farther. Backing into this military quagmire through private military contractors should raise a red flag to the American people as well as their representatives. I urge this subcommittee to hold oversight hearings on this matter as soon as possible.

Mr. Chairman, the list of questions and concerns goes on and on. One thing that is clear to me is that our current policy in Colombia is misguided. If we really want to deal with the drug problem in the United States, we need to take a hard look at ourselves and we need to learn from the mistakes we have made in the past. I believe our current plan will prove to be a failure. It will fail to reduce drug availability and drug use in the U.S. and it will do nothing to improve or even protect the lives of Colombians.

When we begin to consider additional aid for Colombia this year, I hope all of my colleagues take a close look at what we will be trying to accomplish. I will also be working to include strong and enforceable human rights conditions on any future aid that can not simply be waived.