

FEBRUARY 21, 2001

**JOINT STATEMENT OF REPRESENTATIVES JAN SCHAKOWSKY AND JIM MCGOVERN
FROM BOGOTA, COLOMBIA**

BOGOTA, COLOMBIA - U.S. Representatives Jim McGovern (D-MA) and Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) are concluding a six-day visit to Colombia. Schakowsky and McGovern issued the following joint statement before returning to the United States.

"We are here in Colombia as United States policymakers to meet with all sectors of Colombian society and to evaluate U.S. efforts in this extraordinary country.

"First, we wish to express our strong support for President Pastrana's courageous efforts in the peace process, and we urge all armed actors to negotiate in good faith to bring an end to the violence.

"We are here to ensure - and to insist - that the U.S. government is on the side of human rights and on the side of all Colombians. We wish to support a plan for Colombia. But we cannot support this Plan Colombia in its current form, because it does not meet these important goals.

"We have been here for nearly a week, and we have met with hundreds of people. We have talked not only to high-ranking government and military officials, but to the Colombian people themselves. We have met with the peace community in San Jose De Apartado, with farmers in Putumayo, and with displaced families in Barrio Kennedy here in Bogota. We have been moved by their stories. These visits have strengthened our belief that several steps must be taken before we can support Plan Colombia in Congress. These steps include:

1. Insisting that before they receive additional U.S. aid, the Colombian military must demonstrate that it has severed all ties with paramilitary groups, purged officers who work with them, and ensure that these officers are punished. The U.S. must insist that the Colombian government vigorously pursue and prosecute paramilitary actors.

2. Ensuring that U.S. military aid be subject to human rights conditions that are strictly enforced. These conditions must not be subjected to any waiver.

3. Investing more in Colombian civilian institutions, particularly the office of the Attorney General and its human rights unit and the Colombian National Police, in order to support their efforts to protect human rights, safeguard the Colombian people and put an end to impunity.

4. Returning the focus of U.S. Colombian policy to President Pastrana's original vision, by investing more in real economic development assistance that improves the lives of

Colombians in need.

5. Bringing an end to illegal coca cultivation through crop substitution and manual eradication, rather than indiscriminate and dangerous aerial spraying. The proposal is supported by the governor and all 13 mayors of Putumayo.

6. Supporting and protecting organizations that work to bring peace and justice to Colombia, including the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, the U.N. Human Rights office, the World Food Program, non-governmental organizations like ASFADDES and Peace Brigades, and other Colombian and international human rights groups.

7. Addressing the issue of demand for drugs in the United States, which has been responsible for much of the violence and conflict in Colombia.

"In addition, there are actions the United States should take right now to demonstrate our commitment to justice and human rights in Colombia. They include:

1. Placing Carlos Castano and all paramilitary groups on the United States terrorist list, and helping the Colombian authorities to execute the numerous warrants outstanding against paramilitary actors.

2. In the Santo Domingo case, until a thorough investigation has been conducted and appropriate disciplinary action is taken against guilty parties - including those involved in a cover-up - the United States should suspend all ties to the Colombian military units in question.

3. The U.S. should immediately release the funds intended for the Colombian Attorney General's office, without further unnecessary bureaucratic delay.

"The human rights situation in Colombia is not a minor concern for us. It is the critical factor in our deliberations. Unless and until human rights are given the respect they deserve in Congress and the Administration, Plan Colombia cannot meet its worthy goals. We look forward to fighting for these principles in the months ahead.

"Finally, we wish to thank Ambassador Anne Patterson for her commitment and her hard work in making our visit here so successful. We are also very grateful to the Colombian people for making our trip so rewarding."