



**EMBASSY OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**
OFFICE OF THE AMBASSADOR

Bogotá, D.C.
May 7, 2010

Kelly Nicholls
U.S. Office on Colombia
1326 9th Street N.W.
Washington, DC 20001

RE: Threats against human rights defenders

Dear Ms. Nicholls and all concerned:

I have received your letters regarding recent death threats against human rights defenders in Colombia. I share your concerns, and regularly express them to the Government of Colombia. Local NGOs have been very courageous in conducting their work, and many of these threats are undoubtedly a response to that.

Protection of human rights defenders is a key component of the certification process and we will continue to engage the Government of Colombia for improvements. I have hosted consultations with local NGOs at the Embassy to expand our understanding of the human rights situation and encourage their input. On April 19-22, during Assistant Secretary Posner's meetings with the Colombian government and NGOs, he stressed the protection of human rights defenders as a U.S. government priority.

To strengthen the Colombian government's capacity to address this issue, the Embassy provides support and technical assistance. The Department of Justice has provided training, equipment, and technical assistance to the Prosecutor General's Human Rights Unit since 2006. In addition, USAID has allocated \$12.4 million over ten years (2001 - 2011) to support the Ministry of Interior and Justice (MOIJ) Protection Program. In 2009, the MOIJ protected 11,179 social activists, journalists, and other vulnerable groups at an annual cost of \$56 million. USAID provided technical assistance to the MOIJ to strengthen its risk assessment tools and methodologies in accordance with criteria established in key Constitutional Court rulings. In

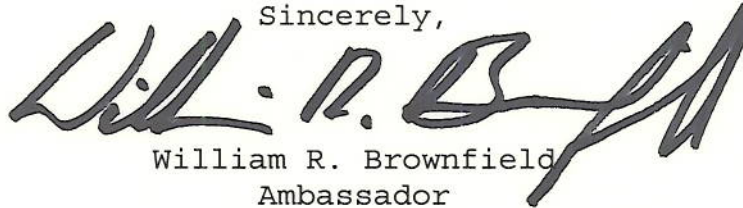
addition, USAID provides self-protection awareness training to at-risk individuals.

In light of recent threats against Father Javier Giraldo of the San Jose de Apartado community, we contacted the office of the Presidential Program for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law. We have requested that the Government coordinate with the Prosecutor General and the Colombian National Police to thoroughly investigate Father Giraldo's case and take appropriate action. We raised the issue of general protection of human rights defenders in meetings last week with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Interior and Justice. Vice President Francisco Santos made a statement on May 2 rejecting the threats and calling on the Prosecutor General's Office to investigate.

Cooperation between the NGO's and the government is critical. I hope we can keep them talking to one another. Anything you can do to encourage that channel of communication would be helpful.

We will continue to engage on this and encourage the government to address this situation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'W. R. Brownfield', written over a printed name and title.

William R. Brownfield
Ambassador

CC:
Gimena Sánchez-Garzoli
Washington Office on Latin America

Adam Isacson
Center for International Policy

Annalise Udall Romoser
Lutheran World Relief

Lisa Haaguard
Latin America Working Group

Andrew Hudson
Human Rights First

James H. Vondracek
Chicago Religious Leadership Network on Latin America (CRLN)

Barbara Gerlach
United Church of Christ Justice and Witness Ministries

Stephen Coats
U.S. Labor Education in the Americas Project

Viviana Krsticevic
CEJIL

Nora Rasman
TransAfrica Forum

Charo Mina Rojas
AFRODES USA

Ted Lewis
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