



May 9, 2017

Honorable Bob Corker  
United States Senate  
Dirksen Senate Office Building SD-425  
Washington DC 20510

Honorable Senator Corker:

It is our wish, as congressional representatives of the largest opposition party in Colombia, to respectfully call your attention to the case of Mr. Andres Felipe Arias, one of the most prominent leaders of our party and who is currently seeking asylum in the United States on grounds of political persecution.

Our party, Centro Democratico, was founded by former President of Colombia Alvaro Uribe Velez; Mr. Arias contributed significantly to the creation of our party and served in its leadership until he and his family were forced into exile.

Andres Felipe Arias served with distinction as Minister of Agriculture of Colombia under former President Uribe's two administrations. As one of the leading cabinet members, Mr. Arias played a central role in negotiating the U.S. – Colombia FTA. It was also Mr. Arias who spearheaded President Uribe's efforts to substitute legal crops for illegal coca plantations on a large scale. It was in large measure thanks to him that Colombia was able to reduce illegal coca plantations to unprecedented minimums by 2010. Mr. Arias ran for president of Colombia in 2010 defending our democratic security policy and its defining commitment fighting narco trafficking and terrorism.

Unfortunately, Mr. Arias, his wife, and their young children (ages 5 and 8) were forced into exile and requested asylum in the United States in June 2014, after an relentless political persecution against him led by a politicized faction of the Supreme Court of Colombia and instigated by corrupt Attorney Generals appointed by President Santos between 2011 and 2016.

Undoubtedly, the persecution against Mr. Arias is part of the efforts by the Santos Administration and its political allies in the judiciary to decimate our party on account of our opposition to the impunity agreements reached with FARC in Havana—opposition that was backed by the majority of Colombians who voted down the agreements at the October 2016 plebiscite. Indeed, through the prolonged negotiations with FARC, many of our party's most

prominent and visible leaders have been unfairly and illegally persecuted, prosecuted, imprisoned, and convicted by a corrupt faction of our judicial system.

In 2011 Mr. Arias was unfairly imprisoned on the basis of bogus criminal charges and without prior conviction. The first alleged offense was having approved of a contract between the Ministry of Agriculture and Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) affiliated with the Organization of American States (OAS) without fulfilling proper legal requirements. The second alleged offense was embezzlement in favor of third parties who committed fraud against a competitive subsidy program designed by the Ministry of Agriculture and operated precisely by IICA – OAS.

The political motivation of the persecution against Mr. Arias is apparent in the fact that the exact same contract he authorized at the time had been signed over 130 times by many of his predecessors over the years. Not one of them has ever been under criminal investigation on that account.

As for the second charge, Mr. Arias was cleared of any allegation of personally benefiting from the private individuals who defrauded the subsidy program. Said individuals testified before the Supreme Court that they neither knew nor in any way supported Mr. Arias, politically or otherwise. Since the subsidy program was not even directly operated by the Ministry under Mr. Arias' charge, the accusation against him lacks any legal grounds whatsoever.

For those reasons, the Inspector General's Office emphatically requested Mr. Arias' acquittal. His conviction by the Supreme Court was so unfair that one of the Justices broke the institutions informal protocol writing a dissenting opinion in which he explicitly deplored the repeated violations of Mr. Arias' rights to due process of law, a proper legal defense, and a fair trial by an impartial judge.

Mr. Arias has also been denied the right to an appeal, in defiance of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and other international treaties signed by Colombia.

Because of Mr. Arias public role as a leader of our party, the Santos Administration has exerted enormous diplomatic pressure on the United States Government to seek his extradition back to Colombia, in defiance of his basic right to seek asylum abroad on ground of political persecution.


The persecution against the leadership of our party threatens the social stability of peace in Colombia. Millions of citizens struggle to understand why a politicized sector of the Colombian judiciary continues to persecute members of our party while FARC narco-traffickers are granted full amnesty for the war crimes and human rights violations. We hope that the

United States will honor its commitment to the rule of law and the international law of asylum by protecting individuals such as Mr. Arias.

Please find attached op-eds written by American journalists, including Mary O'Grady from The Wall Street Journal, detailing the persecution against Mr. Arias and other leaders of our party.

We thank you for your consideration on this matter.

Respectfully,



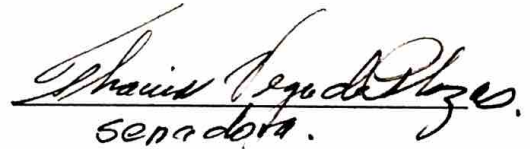
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Álvaro Uribe Vélez  
Former President of Colombia  
Colombian Senator



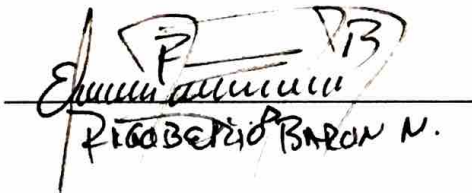
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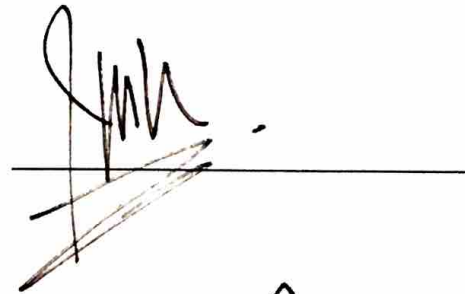
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Phyllis Legendre  
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RIGOBERTO BARRERA N.



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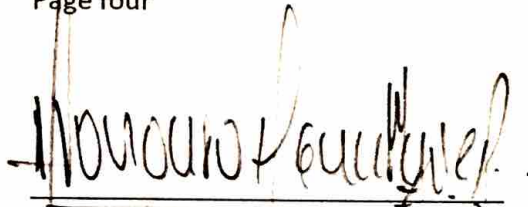
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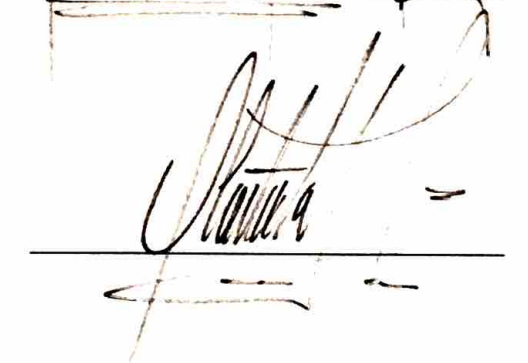
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May 9, 2017  
Page four

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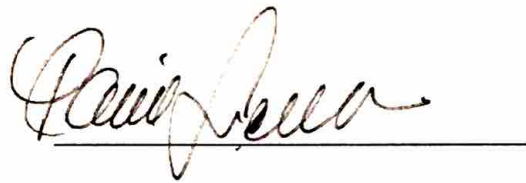
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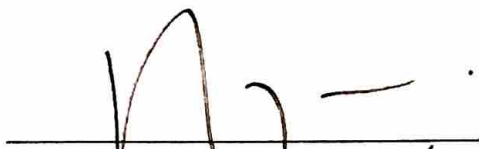
  

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EDUARDO RODRIGUEZ


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SAMUEL HOYOS MEJÍA.


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Santiago Valencia G.

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Piome Garcia

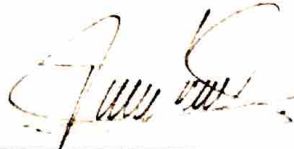
  


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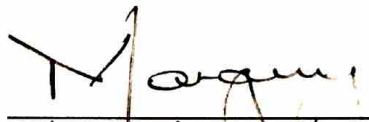
May 9, 2017


Page five

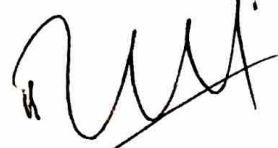
  
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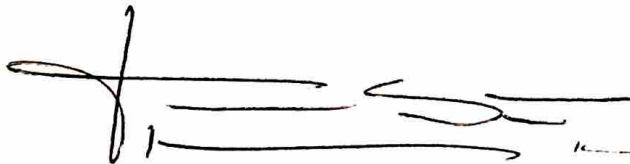
  
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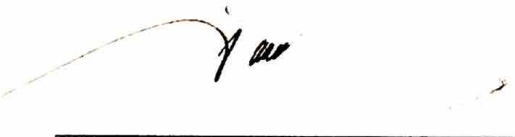
  
Margarita


  
ALFREDO RAMOS NAVA

  
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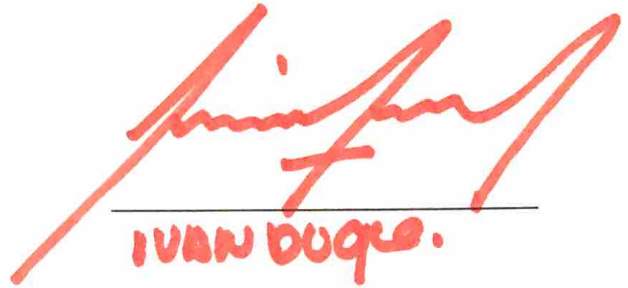
  
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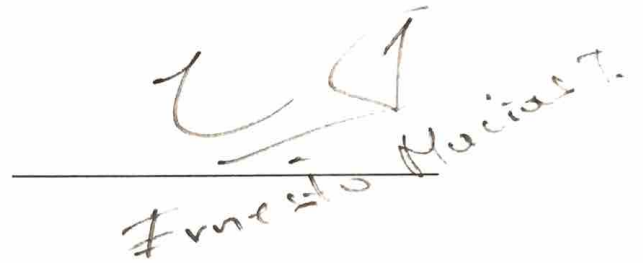
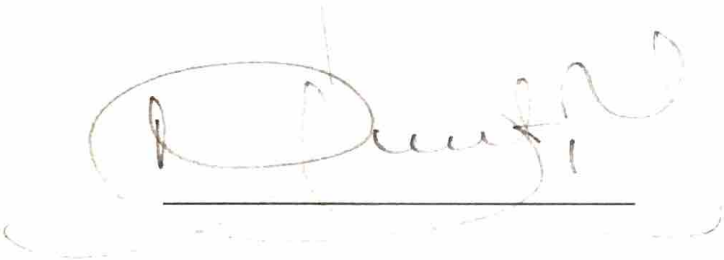
Mayo 9, 2017  
Page six



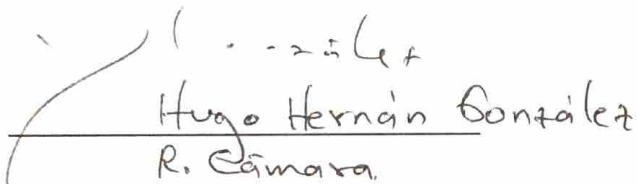
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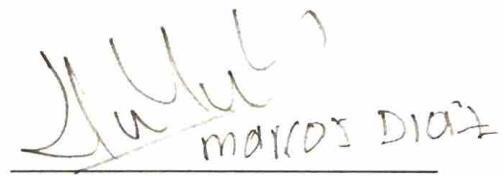
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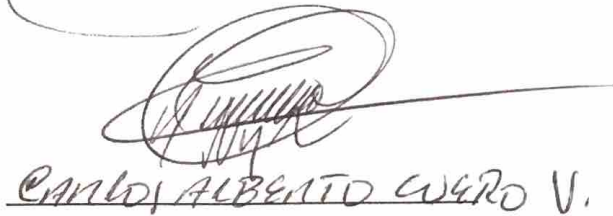
Ernesto Macías.



Hugo Hernán González  
R. Cámara.



MARCO S DÍAZ



CARLOS ALBERTO UTRERO V.