



JESUITS IN ENGLISH CANADA

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April 25, 2008

The Hon. Maxime Bernier
Minister of Foreign Affairs
125 Sussex Drive
Ottawa ON K1A 0G2

Dear Minister Bernier,

We are writing on behalf of the Jesuits in English and French Canada. Our two Jesuit provinces represent priests, brothers and lay professionals who work with us.

We are deeply concerned about a series of recent threats directed against a number of civil society organizations in Colombia, including the Program for Development and Peace of the Magdalena Medio Region (PDPMM) – an organization with which we work and which is headed by two of our fellow Jesuits, Francisco de Roux S.J. and Libardo Valderrama S.J.

According to reports we have received, on April 10th, this Program received a direct threat from a paramilitary group calling itself the “Black Eagles”.

The threat declares members of the Program as “military targets” and insinuates the existence of a list of “undesirable” people – including members of the PDPMM, human rights defenders and members of an agricultural-mining federation -- who must be eliminated. We have attached the statement released by the Program which provides more detailed information about the situation.

We have worked in partnership with the Program of Development and Peace for many years. This organization is well known both in Colombia and internationally and is highly respected for its effective social and economic development work in the Magdalena Medio Region in Colombia. Father de Roux has been to Canada on numerous occasions and is well known by the Canadian churches. Both he and Fr. Valderrama are highly regarded for their courage and commitment in working to improve conditions for the people living in this region, which has suffered from years of violence and conflict.

Though the government of Colombia has given repeated assurances to the international community that paramilitary groups have been demobilized, it is deeply disturbing to see the continued existence of groups such as the “Black Eagles” and to witness the ongoing terror

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that they continue to sow among the population. The threats against our colleagues are extremely serious. We are concerned for the lives of our colleagues and that of the other individuals who have been declared as military targets by the “Black Eagles”.

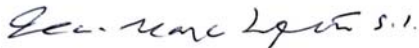
We are aware that the Canadian government is in the final stages of negotiating a new free trade agreement with Colombia and that there are ongoing high level meetings between our countries. We strongly urge that you and your officials raise this matter at the highest levels with the authorities in Colombia.

We urge you to:

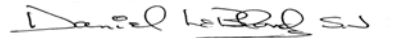
- Immediately call on the Colombian government to protect those who have been threatened and to ensure their safety;
- Insist that there be a thorough investigation into the circumstances of these threats;
- Insist that the paramilitary groups be effectively dismantled;
- Insist that those people responsible for these threats are prosecuted.

We look forward, Minister, for your immediate attention to this matter and to your response to this letter.

Sincerely,



Fr. Jean-Marc Laporte S.J.
Provincial Superior
Jesuits in English Canada



Fr. Daniel LeBlond s.j.
Supérieur Provincial
Province du Canada français et Haïti

c: Mr. Mathew Levin, Canadian Ambassador to Colombia
Mr. Bob Rae, Foreign Affairs Critic, Liberal Party of Canada
Mme Francine Lalonde, Foreign Affairs Critic, Bloc Québécois
Mr. Paul Dewar, Foreign Affairs Critic, New Democratic Party
Very Rev. Gabriel Rodriguez, SJ, Provincial, Colombia Province of the Society of Jesus