



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

London SW1A 2AH

From the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State

Our reference: 64157

Caroline Lucas MEP
ASP-8G103
Rue Wiertz
B-1047
Brussels
Belgium

30-10-08

Dear Caroline,

Thank you for your letter of 9 October to Kim Howells about the Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission (ICJP) in Colombia. I am replying as Minister responsible for our relations with Colombia.

I am grateful to you for raising your concerns with me. I can assure you that the UK Government greatly values the important work undertaken by non-governmental organisations (NGO) in Colombia, including ICJP and Peace Brigades International. Their activity, along with that of other human rights defenders, is essential in establishing greater respect for human rights in Colombia. We will certainly continue our strong support for these groups and individuals.

Like you, I remain concerned at Colombia's human rights situation. The need to protect human rights defenders and promote their work was discussed when the Foreign Secretary met the Colombian Foreign Minister on 9 October. After that meeting the Foreign Secretary commented in a statement: "...Colombia's people - particularly those most vulnerable: indigenous communities, the displaced, human rights defenders and trade unionists - deserve the full protection of the law, and the support of both the Colombian Government and its international partners". I also reiterated human rights concerns when I spoke to the Colombian Foreign Minister on 16 October.

We also provide practical support for civil society actors promoting human rights in Colombia: a full list can be found on the Colombia pages of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's (FCO) website: www.fco.gov.uk.

Officials from the FCO and the British Embassy in Bogotá have met representatives of NGOs, including Peace Brigades International, to discuss arrangements for a forthcoming visit to the Curvaradó river basin by European Union Missions in Bogotá. FCO officials hope to participate in this visit. I am hopeful that this visit will provide ICJP with the political support it



needs – such recognition by the international community has, in our experience, been helpful to such organisations under threat. I understand that EU representatives also plan to raise their concerns regarding the situation in Curvaradó with the Colombian Government.

I hope this is helpful. Thank you once again for your personal engagement on this issue. I hope you will continue to raise concerns directly with the Colombian authorities and with me.

*Yours sincerely,
Gillian*

GILLIAN MERRON