



Leo W. Gerard
International President

November 13, 2007

VIA FAX

Honorable Robert C. Byrd, Chairman, Committee on Appropriations
Honorable Patrick J. Leahy, Chairman, Appropriations Subcommittee on
State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr., Chairman, Committee on Foreign Relations
Honorable Chris Dodd, Chairman, Foreign Relations Subcommittee on
Western Hemisphere, Peace Corps and Narcotics Affairs
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Honorable David Obey, Chairman, Committee on Appropriations
Honorable Nita M. Lowey, Chairman, Appropriations Subcommittee on
State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
Honorable Tom Lantos, Chairman, Committee on Foreign Affairs
Honorable Eliot L. Engel, Chairman, Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on
The Western Hemisphere
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Senator/Representative:

On behalf of the 850,000 members of the United Steelworkers, I write to urge the Committee to examine carefully the proposed \$500 million in security assistance to Mexico included in the Administration's supplemental funding request.

The USW believes that drug trafficking poses a threat to the well-being and security of people in the United States and throughout the hemisphere. We support strengthening security forces to combat the drug cartels as part of a comprehensive approach to this problem that also includes drug treatment and the creation of economic alternatives in producing countries.

However, the approach in the President's "Merida Initiative," more popularly known as Plan Mexico, is fatally flawed. It will do little to control drug trafficking, and is likely to further undermine human rights and labor rights in Mexico. As proposed, we oppose Plan Mexico for the following reasons:

First, it has been developed in secrecy and presented in haste, without consultation with the legislatures in either the U.S. or Mexico. Many details of the proposal have still not been made public.

Second, and most importantly, the Administration is asking Congress to give the Mexican government a blank check for \$500 million, with no conditions or restrictions. In view of the widespread corruption and systematic violations of human rights and labor rights being committed

United Steel, Paper and Forestry, Rubber, Manufacturing, Energy, Allied Industrial and Service Workers International Union

today in Mexico, and the failure of a similar policy in Colombia, this is a most dangerous and ill-advised move.

The Mexican government's institutional failures in the area of human rights are well documented. What the State Department's 2006 Human Rights Report described as "a deeply entrenched culture of impunity and corruption" has continued in the first year of the Calderón administration with numerous incidents of violence committed by security forces against the civilian population.

According to Human Rights Watch, "Over the past two years, Mexican soldiers have committed egregious abuses while engaged in law enforcement activities. In July 2006, for example, soldiers in Coahuila state beat seven municipal policemen and sexually abused 14 women, according to the national human rights ombudsman. In May 2007, soldiers arbitrarily detained 65 people in Michoacán state, holding some incommunicado at a military base, beating many of the detainees, and raping four minors. In June, soldiers opened fire against a truck in Sinaloa, killing five people, including three children, and injuring three others." In addition, according to Amnesty International, "State, Municipal and Federal police have also been implicated in serious human rights violations during civil disturbances in San Salvador Atenco, the state of Mexico, and in Oaxaca during 2006, including excessive use of force, arbitrary detentions, torture and other ill-treatment, and unfair trials. These abuses have gone virtually unpunished." Moreover, the government's proposed penal code reforms threaten to perpetuate this impunity by, in Amnesty International's words, "limiting judicial scrutiny of police and prosecutors investigating serious crimes, while not establishing independent, effective and transparent mechanisms to investigate possible corruption or human rights violations."

Independent labor unions have been a particular target of government repression. The Calderón administration and the mining company Grupo Mexico have launched a full-scale attack on the National Union of Mine and Metal Workers and its General Secretary, Napoleón Gómez Urrutia, that includes:

- arbitrarily withdrawing legal recognition from Gómez and other elected union leaders, based on forged evidence;
- filing baseless criminal charges, disproved by an audit of the union's finances, that forced Gómez to leave the country;
- deploying military and security forces against the union, resulting in the deaths of three union members;
- granting overnight recognition to a pro-company union and holding "elections" in which workers were forced to vote publicly in front of company officials;
- refusing to punish the Grupo Mexico officials responsible for the deaths of 65 miners in the explosion at the Pasta de Conchos mine in February 2006.

All of these actions, and many other current cases, flagrantly violate the international labor rights established by the International Labor Organization and the North American Agreement on Labor Cooperation.

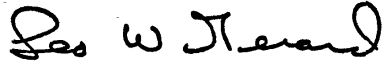
Without fundamental institutional reforms in Mexico, and concrete commitments on the part of the Mexican government to cease its violations of labor and human rights, we believe that the money requested by the Administration will serve to reinforce a pattern of impunity. Indeed, the repression of labor unions and human rights organizations will likely lead even more Mexicans to conclude that their only future lies in migration to the U.S.

We urge you, before considering the Administration's proposal, to give a voice to independent labor unions and human rights defenders in Mexico by holding hearings at which they can present direct testimony of these violations. While we are aware that Chairman Lantos is holding a hearing of the full House Committee on Foreign Affairs, only government officials will be testifying, which we

believe is insufficient to address labor and human rights issues in a balanced manner. We also encourage you to examine ways in which U.S. foreign assistance can be used to promote a strategy of economic development based on respect for human and labor rights in Mexico.

I look forward to working with you to achieve these objectives.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Leo W. Gerard". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Leo" being the most prominent.

Leo W. Gerard
International President

LWG/pak