

May 25, 2019

OPEN LETTER TO Mr. DEAN BAQUET, CEO OF THE NEW YORK TIMES

FROM: LILIA SOLANO, Human Rights activist

As a Human Rights activist and on my behalf and that of the victims of violence in Colombia, I want to express my appreciation for your report of May 19th, 2019 on the instructions that the Colombian Army recently issued in order to increase the results of their military activities.

Such old story, the one of the Colombian State killing civilians, has seen the different US governments acting as its ally. Alleging to be engaged in worldwide crusades such as the one against communism, later on the one on National Security, and more recently an alleged war on drugs, the US has managed to keep backward, antidemocratic and even criminal elites in power, both in Colombia and virtually elsewhere.

Ever since the so called "Plan Colombia" days, in 1999, the financial and military muscle that the White House provided is allowing the Colombian State to assassinate, not drug lords, but peasants and their spokespersons. One of the results of such campaigning is the strengthening of the economic and political power of local mafias whose influence is pervasive at regional and national levels. Even the Judiciary has fallen prey to their power.

The US populace has been kept unawares of such handling of the public resources of their nation. The funds that are channeled to strengthen democracy in Colombia and combat drug trafficking are being used to systematically kill social leaders. Our constant reporting on such crimes has gone unnoticed. However, even in the worst moment of the history of bilateral relations, the US has maintained that Colombia is its best partner in the region. Apparently, Colombia's record of extrajudicial executions, disappearances and internal displacement is not factored in such relationship. As a case in point, just recently the current US ambassador in Colombia, Mr. Whitaker summoned several key Congress persons in order to pressure their approval to the objections that the Colombian President, Mr. Duque, had brought forward in order to bring to a stop the efforts to implement the peace accords that were recently signed with the armed insurgency.

Hereby I want to ask that your newspaper call the US nation to look into the root causes of such history of violence. Most of the mass media in Colombia lack the degree of independence that is needed in a robust democracy. The Colombian media would rather hide relevant information from the Colombian people, even at the cost of thousands of lives. It is of the utmost importance that reports such as the one The New York Times published open the way for the international media as well to give voice to those who do not speak for the establishment.

It is our hope that you keep on walking alongside those who strive after building a long lasting culture of peace and dignity in Colombia. Thanks for publishing this letter.