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DEVELOPMENT

Brussels,
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To the attention of
Members of the European Parliament who signed the letter of 20 November

Dear Colleagues,

Thank you for your letter of 20 November addressed to both of us as well as to Commissioners Georgieva and De Gucht concerning land acquisitions in Colombia.

Land issues are obviously one of the key dimensions of the decade-old internal conflict in Colombia and therefore deserve close attention on the part of the EU. This is the reason why the EU has been devoting considerable financial resources to funding projects aimed at helping displaced people, at facilitating their return and reintegration and at supporting people at risk in the framework of the land restitution process. Moreover, the EU is also directly contributing to the implementation of the law on victims and land restitution through a project funded in the framework of the instrument for stability.

At political level, the issues related to the implementation of the law are also discussed regularly in the framework of the various dialogue fora between the EU and Colombia, including the EU-Colombia Dialogue on Human Rights. The EU is also engaged in exchanges with the Colombian authorities about mining and natural resources, which have an obvious relation with land use and occupation issues. The EU is hopeful that the current negotiations between the FARC and the Colombian authorities should, if they are successful, contribute to reducing tensions about land in Colombia.

We have also been informed that the Colombian Institute for Rural Development (INCODER), in charge of the formalisation of land titles, has launched a number of enquiries into a number of cases of alleged undue accumulation of agricultural family units (UAF), including in the region to which your correspondence refers. I hope that these enquiries will help solve the problems to which you refer to.

The European Union also shares your concerns about the threats received by a number of human rights activists, notably those involved in the land restitution process. The EU Delegation to Colombia remains in constant touch with human rights activists and regularly intervenes with the authorities in order to advocate the provision of adequate protection measures for persons at risk. The EU working group on human rights, which gathers representatives of the various EU missions in Colombia, also regularly exchanges information on persons subject to threats and its members carry out joint visits to respected human rights activists.

Lastly, I would also like to indicate that the Commission and the EEAS are currently preparing a policy initiative on the responsible sourcing of minerals in conflict-affected and high risk areas which could help address and prevent a number of conflicts about land use in countries such as Colombia.

Yours sincerely,

Catherine Ashton

Andris Piebalgs

Member of the European Parliament

(Signatories to the letter of 20 November ARES 3540142)

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