

TRADEJUSTICE

New York Metro

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News Release

Activists Protest Newly Elected Colombian President Santos, Charge Complicity in Mass Murder of Colombian Citizens

On Thursday, September 23rd at 8PM, TradeJustice New York Metro, Global Justice for Animals and the Environment and the New York Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador will protest newly elected Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos at a public dinner hosted by the Council of the Americas, at Essex House, 160 Central Park South between 6th and 7th Avenues.

Prior to his election as president, Santos was Colombia's Minister of Defense at the height of the ongoing false positives scandal, in which thousands of Colombians have been executed by the armed forces and then dressed up in guerrilla fatigues to pretend they had fallen in combat. Human rights groups argue that Santos should stand trial at the International Criminal Court for this atrocity.

Santos seeks to continue the neoliberal economic policies that have increased poverty, unemployment and social inequality in Colombia. He is in favor of free trade agreements with the US and EU that will hand over even more control to the multinationals. Santos argues that the United States Colombian Free Trade Agreement will help defeat armed rebels and combat cocaine trafficking. In reality, the agreement will expand unsustainable monoculture industries in Colombia, displacing local farmers and forcing them to resort to illegal activity such as coca production, trafficking in cocaine and endangered species, and illegal logging. To combat an increase in illegal activity, the United States will expand its "War on Drugs" - particularly its toxic fumigation program.

Colombia is considered to have the worst human rights record in the western hemisphere, with the highest rate of unionist killings on the planet (36 union leaders killed so far this year according to the CUT labor federation), second highest level of internal displacement after the Sudan (estimated at between 3,303,979 and 4,915,579 by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center) and fifth highest rate of journalist assassinations with 13 unsolved murders of journalists according to the Committee to Protect Journalists. Given Santos' own record of human rights atrocities, Colombians hold little hope that Santos will remedy these problems.

Like his predecessor, Santos is aggressively campaigning for a free trade agreement with the United States. According to the Sierra Club, "As written, the [free trade] agreement puts the profit of foreign corporations before domestic environmental and health regulations. The agreement weakens the screening process for food imports to the U.S. while also expanding the monopoly of U.S. drug companies, making access to life-

saving drugs even more difficult in Colombia, according to the Pan-American Health Organization.

Colombia, which encompasses vast tracks of Amazon rainforest, contains tremendous biodiversity and natural resources that could be opened up to corporate plunder without sufficient environmental safeguards. According to the Wildlife Conservation Society, "While world-renowned for its richness in bird species, Colombia also has an extraordinary diversity of amphibians and mammals, as well as orchids and butterflies. The dry, montane, and cloud forests of the Colombian Andes support an array of wildlife, including the pacarana, Andean condor, puma, golden-plumed parakeet, red howler monkey, Andean bear, mountain tapir, and neo-tropical otter. Unfortunately, habitat loss, mining, oil exploration, ecosystem fragmentation, palm oil and coca plantations, poaching, and wildlife trade are threatening Colombia's natural heritage."

Paramilitary groups continue to use death threats and murder to seize subsistence farmers' land for palm oil bio-diesel production. This practice is expected to increase due to growing foreign investment in palm oil coupled with weak human rights protections in the Colombia Free Trade Agreement

While making overtures towards reconciliation with rival Venezuela, Santos simultaneously welcomes US military bases in Colombia, which many Colombians see as a threat to national sovereignty and a provocation in a politically tense region.

According to Colombian Arturo Pizano, "Santos will continue the policies of his predecessor – military atrocities, quiet complicity with terrorist groups and drug lords, and a push for free trade agreements that will only benefit the super-rich at the expense of Colombia's workers, peasants, indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, and the Amazon rainforest."

Additional info at <http://gjae.org/?page=ColombiaReport>

<http://tradejustice.net/?page=ColombiaExtReport>

<http://tradejustice.net/?page=ColombiaFTA>