

## **A LETTER FROM THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS AND MOVEMENTS OF THE AMERICAS TO THE DEFENSE MINISTERS**

On the occasion of the X Conference of Defense Ministers of the Americas to take place in Punta del Este, Uruguay, on October 8-10, 2012, we make the following statement:

When we met this year at the People's Summit in Cartagena, Colombia, which paralleled the Summit of the Americas, we made public our concern with the increase in U.S. military presence in the area. This development threatens the sovereignty of our peoples and the right to peace that governments should guarantee.

At this moment, the social movements and organizations of the Americas request a proactive commitment by the governments to demilitarize the continent, which implies the following concrete steps, among others:

- The elimination of foreign military bases in the hemisphere and the withdrawal of foreign troops using local bases
- The cancellation of joint military exercises carried out under the aegis and doctrines of the U.S. Pentagon
- The closing of the *School of the Americas*, renamed WHINSEC-the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation
- The cessation of coast and river patrols by the U.S. Fourth Fleet in Latin America
- A definitive end to the military character of the "war on drugs" --which is causing thousands of annual deaths, particularly in Colombia, Mexico, and Central America--, and its replacement by a multilateral, many-sided public policy with an emphasis on public health measures

We also urge governments to reverse the tendency to militarize state functions that are not within the purview of Defense and the military. Democratic governments of law have civil agencies designed specifically to deal with humanitarian crises resulting from natural catastrophes, with migration control and the personal security of the citizenry. The Armed Forces have been designed to deal with conflicts involving other nations, conflicts that might develop into armed confrontations. None of the situations mentioned place national sovereignty at risk. Therefore there is no reason to use state structures designed for other purposes, to replace or complement the work of institutions specifically designed for those functions.

We reject the U.S.-driven policy being adopted in some countries of involving the Armed Forces in matters of internal security under the pretext of "new threats." The alleged threats range from narco-trafficking to social protests, public opposition to infrastructure megaprojects and to an agribusiness model of economic development. Internal security is the absolute sphere of the Police, which should maintain control over such matters with strict respect for human rights. Neither the Armed Forces nor the Police should be used by governments to suppress social protest.

We emphasize the need to reverse the increase in military spending so often promoted by cooperation agreements with the United States. The experience of multiple nations reveals that spending for military purposes results in cutbacks in social programs. We believe that the Defense Ministers Summit constitutes an excellent opportunity to advance an agenda of demilitarization of the continent with the goal of making the Americas a region of peace.

Aid to Haiti should not have a military character. Security is a multidimensional issue which should include human rights as an integral component. We call upon the governments to continue and increase economic and social aid to the Haitian Republic and to finalize the complete withdrawal of MINUSTAH troops in the next stage of the mission.

We reject the institutional coup d'état in Paraguay much as we denounced the coup d'état in Honduras. We do so with the same conviction and respect for national self-determination, sovereignty and a government of laws. We sound the alert to our governments about the reoccurrence of these events in other countries in the region and the need to follow up public statements rejecting such episodes with concrete political measures. Otherwise illegitimate governments end up acquiring legitimacy in the eyes of the international community.

In this context we are profoundly concerned about recent events in Argentina. Let us not forget that building democracy is nourished by discussion and give-and-take, arguments and counter-arguments over ideas and proposals, not through the illegitimate use of power to disrupt a government of laws. Our countries endured a sad and terrible history in recent decades, a history that we must not forget; neither governments nor people should allow a return to the horrors of the past.

Finally, we urge the governments to pay special attention to the opening of a dialog announced in Colombia which would lead to a negotiated solution to the armed strife in that country. The violence unleashed by this conflict has caused thousands of deaths, millions of displaced people, and serious violations of human rights. It has become a pretext for U.S. intervention in Colombia and the entire region. The end of the armed confrontation would be a necessary and welcome contribution to regional stability and national sovereignty as well as to the strengthening of regional integration.

### **Latin America and the Caribbean: A Region of Peace – No to Foreign Military Bases Campaign**

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