



The President

303656 08.03.2013

To the signatories of the open letter addressed by ODHACO to the President of the European Parliament on the situation of human rights in Colombia

Dear Sirs,

Thank you for your open letter. Allow me in response to remedy to what appears to be an unfortunate misunderstanding by giving a few additional elements about my longstanding commitment to the respect of human rights in general and in Colombia in particular.

In your letter, you list an awfully large number of tragic occurrences, all of which I am perfectly aware of. I have advocated for these cases and others in previous visits to Colombia as well as through exchanges of letters with the highest office holders in Colombia. My recent visit to Bogota was designed in a similar spirit and approach: to foster and reinforce a partnership that we highly value, while tackling all issues at stake in our bilateral relationship.

You rightly mention the roadmap to the signature of the Free Trade Agreement. Allow me to emphasise that I was amongst those parliamentarians who initiated it and defended it in the European Parliament and in front of the Colombian government, which finally accepted to endorse such a proposal in order to improve the overall human rights situation in Colombia and to make the respect of human rights an essential part of our Free Trade Agreement.

The European Parliament ratified the Free Trade Agreement in December 2012 and my visit to Colombia as President of the European Parliament was the appropriate next step. I was particularly keen to see the progress in the implementation of the roadmap and to discuss it with political interlocutors at highest level.

Allow me to underline that I was unfortunately constrained to shorten my programme in Colombia due to illness, as you might have read in the press. I had however insisted to keep the meeting scheduled with representatives of civil society and NGOs, to hear from them and discuss with them the overall human rights situation including - among others - threats to trade unionists, impunity, the situation of indigenous people and problems related to the implementation of the "*ley de restitución de tierras*", ahead of my meeting with President Santos. It was indeed an extremely useful and productive meeting, as reflected in the final press release issued at the end of my visit.

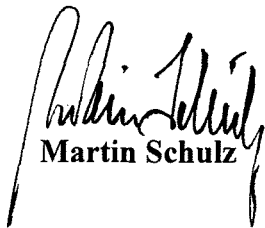
Throughout my whole political career, notably when I was a member of the Subcommittee on Human Rights in the European Parliament, I have always adopted a

clear line in contributing to improving the situation of individuals and human rights by openly raising issues directly with the relevant authorities and interlocutors in order to achieve concrete results.

Be assured that this line has not changed since then. I hope that the above mentioned elements can shed a fairer light on my recent visit to Colombia.

I would be grateful if you could share my reply with whom it may concern.

Yours,



Martin Schulz