[Opposing Human Rights Violations in Colombia]

Resolution opposing human rights violations in Colombia and demanding the implementation of the Leahy Law to suspend economic assistance to the Colombian Anti-Riot Police Force, also known as the Mobile Anti-Disturbances Squadron.

WHEREAS, The Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San Francisco is committed to upholding the Freedom of Assembly and is deeply concerned about the human rights violations being perpetrated against civilians across Colombia; and

WHEREAS, On April 28, 2021, protests in Colombia erupted over a tax reform that would have increased taxes for working-class individuals and businesses, and eliminated multiple exemptions while the country faces a COVID-19 surge fueling increasing inequality and unemployment, as currently over 42% of the population lives in poverty; and

WHEREAS, Tens of thousands of protesters have marched in Colombia and globally over the proposed reform, and although Colombian President Ivan Duque recently withdrew the policy, protesters remain in the streets to denounce human rights abuses towards Colombian activists during the national strike, and demonstrations are anticipated to continue; and

WHEREAS, As of the day of this Resolution’s introduction, national protests have continued for 14 straight days responding to police brutality, the devastating economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, massive inequality, and rising distrust of the government; and

WHEREAS, Police have been widely documented firing indiscriminately at protesters and activists, leaving at least 40 people murdered by security forces and another 489 injured; and
WHEREAS, As of May 8, 2021, 1,814 people had reported cases of police brutality; and
WHEREAS, There have been at least 12 victims of sexual assault and 15 victims of gender-based violence, committed by the Colombian police force in connection with the protests; and
WHEREAS, Colombian police have carried out 1,365 detentions during recent demonstrations, and 435 people are presumed missing; and
WHEREAS, Social media users in Colombia have reported censorship of videos and hashtags, such as #SOSColombia, as they fight for international intervention; and
WHEREAS, Crowds of protesters continue to grow even as Colombia endures its third wave of the COVID-19 virus, with ICU occupancy in the country’s most populated cities above 75% and an average 500 people dying per day, further demonstrating the urgency of the protesters’ cry for justice; and
WHEREAS, Last year, Colombia’s domestic product dropped by 6.8%, signaling the deepest economic crash in half a century, and creating further precarity for Colombians as 3.6 million Colombians were pushed into poverty; and
WHEREAS, The demonstrations are a continuation of protests expressing concerns about limited opportunity and corruption that spread throughout Latin America in late 2019-2020, and were only interrupted by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic; and
WHEREAS, Colombia routinely ranks as one of the worst countries for human rights violations globally by groups such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, and has over 7 million internally displaced residents as identified by the United Nations Refugee Agency; and
WHEREAS, More than 27,000 people have been displaced from their homes due to violence in Colombia this year, a 177% spike from the previous year, leaving Colombians no escape from the bloodshed; and
WHEREAS, Afro-descendant and Indigenous communities in Colombia are at risk of and have been disproportionately impacted by poverty, violence, and displacement as a consequence of historic government neglect and disregard for their human rights; and

WHEREAS, Over 1065 social leaders, 287 of which were Indigenous peoples and 75 Afro-descendants, have been murdered between 2016 and 2020 since the Colombian Peace Deal was signed in August of 2016; and

WHEREAS, The violent response to the National Strike in Colombia represents a significant threat to democracy, rights to peaceful assembly and protest, and could be perceived as a warning to other Latin American countries fighting for democracy and civil rights; and

WHEREAS, The United States has aided and abetted these murders by using taxpayer dollars to provide weapons, resources, and other equipment in the form of military aid packages, which are now being used to open fire on civilians; and

WHEREAS, Since 2001, the U.S. has sent over $9 billion dollars to Colombia through Plan Colombia, which is how the Colombian Anti-Riot Police Force, Mobile Anti-Disturbances Squadron (ESMAD), a police force used solely during protests and responsible for the deaths of over 300 people, was founded; and

WHEREAS, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), known for human rights abuses and threatening civil liberties, was dispatched to Colombia in 2016 to provide training for the national police; and

WHEREAS, The Leahy Law was approved by Congress in 1997 to prohibit the U.S.’s complicity in international atrocities by supplying equipment and training to a foreign military suspected of perpetrating “gross human rights violations;” and
WHEREAS, U.S. Representatives have called on the Leahy Law to freeze aid to Colombian military forces until the violence ends and the government has taken appropriate action towards bringing perpetrators to justice; and

WHEREAS, Senators Bob Menéndez (D-N.J.) and Jessica Ramos (D-13), and Representatives Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-N.Y.), Ayanna Pressley (D-Mass.), Gregory Meeks (D-N.Y.), Jim McGovern (D-Mass.) and Ilhan Omar (D-Minn.) have expressed concern over the government’s violent response and solidarity with protesters; and

WHEREAS, On April 25, 1945, the Charter of the United Nations and the Statute of the New International Court of Justice were signed in San Francisco, making the City the home of human rights progress and defense; and

WHEREAS, Hundreds have gathered in San Francisco, and across the Bay Area, to protest the ongoing police brutality and national crisis to show support for the international Colombian community; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the San Francisco City and County Board of Supervisors fully supports the protesters and activists in Colombia and joins the international condemnation of the repression and violence being perpetrated by the Colombian government against civilians and protesters; and, be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the City and County of San Francisco stands in solidarity with the Latin American immigrant community, and recognizes the contributions of Colombian immigrants and Colombian-Americans to the social fabric and diversity of our community; and, be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the San Francisco City and County Board of Supervisors calls on the Congress of the United States of America to apply the Leahy Law and suspend all sales of crowd control equipment, training, and services to the Colombian security forces to
guarantee freedom of movement and equitable access to testing, health care, humanitarian
aid, and vaccinations; and, be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the San Francisco City and County Board of Supervisors
demands that President Duque’s administration create and sustain pathways for dialogue with
Colombian communities harmed by violence, poverty, and displacement in order to advance
peace and equity in the country, be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the San Francisco City and County Board of Supervisors
demands a suspension to U.S. military aid to Colombia and calls on Congresswoman Nancy
Pelosi and Senators Diane Feinstein and Xavier Becerra to support the suspension of US
military aid to Colombia; and, be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the San Francisco Board of Supervisors hereby directs
the Clerk of the Board to transmit copies to the members of Congress from San Francisco and
the United States Senators from California with a request to take all action necessary to
achieve the objectives of this Resolution.
Resolution opposing human rights violations in Colombia and demanding the implementation of the Leahy Law to suspend economic assistance to the Colombian Anti-Riot Police Force, also known as the Mobile Anti-Disturbances Squadron.

May 18, 2021 Board of Supervisors - ADOPTED
Ayes: 11 - Chan, Haney, Mandelman, Mar, Melgar, Peskin, Preston, Ronen, Safai, Stefani and Walton

Resolution was ADOPTED on 5/18/2021 by the Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San Francisco.