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October 7, 2020

The Honorable William P. Barr
Attorney General of the United States
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Ave. N.W.
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Mr. Attorney General:

As co-chair of the Congressional Colombia Caucus, I support efforts to further foster the strong relationship between the United States and the Republic of Colombia that was forged through implementation of Plan Colombia, the Andean Counterdrug Initiative (ACI), and other key efforts to combat transnational criminal and terrorist organizations which pose a direct security threat to our hemisphere.

As part of that partnership with the government of then-President Álvaro Uribe, the U.S. Department of Justice announced an agreement in 2008 to extradite fourteen former Colombian paramilitary and drug trafficking suspects who had been captured by Uribe's government and faced criminal indictments in the United States. According to the announcement, one of those captured was Juan Carlos Sierra-Ramirez, alias "El Tuso", who was convicted and served his sentence in federal prison (Register Number 80518-004) through March 14, 2013.

According to multiple press reports, Sierra-Ramirez was visited on May 22, 2009 by anti-Uribe Senator Iván Cepeda of the Colombian opposition Democratic Alternative Pole Party in prison. According to statements allegedly made by Sierra-Ramirez and reported in the Colombian media, Cepeda offered to arrange political asylum for Sierra-Ramirez and his family in Switzerland if, in return, he would incriminate former President Uribe in criminal associations. Additionally, other troubling reports indicate that Cepeda visited other inmates in U.S. federal prisons in 2009, allegedly with the same intention to persuade others extradited with Sierra-Ramirez in 2008 to produce testimony against Uribe.

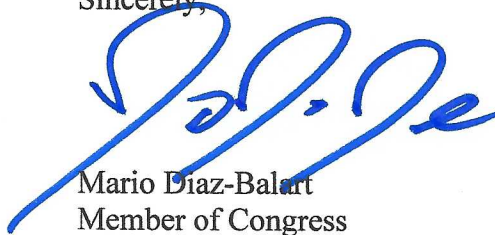
If these reports are true, it would present disturbing questions as to whether a foreign actor had access to a prisoner in U.S. custody for the purpose corruption, interference in judicial proceedings, or even suborning perjury. It would also raise questions as to the extent of the previous administration's knowledge and approval of the nature of these visits. For these reasons, and to gain a better understanding of the truth or falsity of these alarming reports, I respectfully request responses to the following questions:

1. Can the Department confirm the visit(s) of Senator Iván Cepeda with federal inmate Juan Carlos Sierra-Ramirez in 2009 or any other time while he was in federal custody? If so, what was the date and location of the visit(s)? Did anyone else accompany Senator Cepeda on the visit?
2. Was the meeting observed, monitored, or recorded by official representatives of the U.S. Federal Bureau of Prisons, or other personnel under the Department's jurisdiction? If so, do records or minutes of the meeting exist and could you provide those records to me or other Members of Congress?
3. Can the Department confirm that Senator Cepeda met with any other inmate(s) at any U.S. federal correctional facilities? If so, does the Department have record of Mr. Cepeda's visits to other inmates at any other U.S. federal correctional facilities? If so, what were the dates, locations and inmates he visited? Are there any records related to those visits and if so, could you provide them to me or other Members of Congress?

Reports of these visits raise grave concerns which could have serious ramifications for the relationship between the United States and Colombia. Accordingly, I appreciate any assistance in providing information within all applicable rules and regulations, and I look forward to working with the Trump Administration toward strengthening the U.S.-Colombia partnership and safeguarding the security interests of the United States.

I appreciate your attention to this issue of utmost importance matter.

Sincerely,



Mario Diaz-Balart
Member of Congress