

**CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES
COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515**

The Honorable Colin I. Powell
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington D.C. 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary,

We are writing to urge that the United States rejoin the International Coffee Organization (ICO), which is the main intergovernmental organization for both coffee producing and consuming nations. The next opportunity for the United States to join the ICO will take place at their annual meeting beginning on September 15. ICO membership serves our national interest by reviving the Colombian coffee industry and decreasing the cultivation of illicit crops in Colombian coffee growing areas, which are an increasing source of funds for narco-terrorist organizations.

As you may be aware, there is a severe, ongoing crisis in the worldwide coffee industry that is having a devastating impact on coffee growers. This is particularly the case in Colombia, which has suffered close to a 50 percent decline in its coffee revenue in the past decade. The crisis is leading some Colombian coffee farmers to turn to the cultivation of illegal, but highly profitable, crops such as coca and opium. In some Colombian regions, up to 20 percent of the land that was previously dedicated to coffee production is now used for growing illicit crops.

This problem is compounded by the dispersion of coca and opium plants among coffee plants, making aerial spraying less effective. In addition, we have received reports that unemployed coffee farmers are now being used by narco-terrorist groups as growers, pickers and couriers of illegal drugs. Given that over 90 percent of the cocaine and growing share of the heroin entering the United States is from Colombia, this trend is a direct threat to our national security and war on drugs.

The economic instability caused by the coffee crisis in Colombia could directly impact our interest in several other ways. First, high unemployment in coffee growing regions in Colombia and in other Latin American countries has the potential to cause dislocation of rural populations and migration – including increased illegal immigration to the United States. Second, the coffee crisis strains already weak economic conditions in Colombia and other coffee producing states in the region, thus hamstringing their ability to address threats to their security such as narco-terrorism.

In our view, an important step in revitalizing the Colombian coffee industry is United States membership in the ICO. As the leading coffee consuming nation, joining the ICO will strengthen our ability to address the coffee crisis and promote policies that will benefit high-quality coffee growing countries such as Colombia. We also believe that increased attention and resources should be dedicated to aiding coffee growers to develop profitable markets or, where necessary, alternative cash crops.

In addition, ICO membership would be a positive development for U.S. consumers. The ICO supports market-based solutions to the current coffee crisis and is also working to ensure that coffee supplies continue to be available in many varieties and from many different countries. U.S. influence within the ICO can be used to reinforce these goals.

United States membership in the ICO is strongly supported by the National Coffee Association, which represents all segments of the U.S. coffee industry including many small and medium-sized businesses.

Please let us know if we can provide additional information. Thank you in advance for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely yours,

(Signed) HENRY HYDE
Chairman
International Relations Committee

(Signed) TOM LANTOS
Ranking Member
International Relations Committee

(Signed) ELTON GALLEGLY
Chairman
Subcommittee on International Terrorism,
Nonproliferation & Human Rights

(Signed) BRAD SHERMAN
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on International Terrorism,
Nonproliferation & Human Rights

(Signed) CASS BALLENGER
Chairman
Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere

(Signed) ROBERT MENENDEZ
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere

cc: The Honorable Condoleezza Rice
The Honorable John P. Walters
The Honorable Andrew S. Natsios