

# **U.S. Releases Aid to Colombia**

State Dept. Says Bogota Met Conditions on Human Rights

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The State Department said yesterday that Colombia has met U.S. conditions on respecting human rights, triggering the release of \$31.6 million in aid to the Colombian military, according to a senior U.S. official.

Human rights groups criticized the decision, arguing the Colombian military has not done enough to pursue officers accused of human rights violations or to sever ties to the country's paramilitary groups.

Under U.S. law, Colombia's military must meet conditions -- including cutting links with paramilitary groups and suspending officers credibly accused of gross human rights violations -- to get some of the aid.

The law provides that 75 percent of the roughly \$252 million in aid this year may go ahead without Washington certifying that Colombia has met its conditions. The remainder is released in two 12.5 percent tranches, U.S. officials said.

A senior State Department official said the \$31.6 million corresponded to the first tranche.

Last week, the United States said it would withhold about \$5 million in military aid to Colombia this year because it has failed to sign an agreement that would protect U.S. personnel from prosecution by the International Criminal Court.

The State Department official said Washington would deduct this money from the second 12.5 percent tranche unless Colombia signed a so-called Article 98 agreement offering these protections.

State Department spokesman Philip Reeker said Colombia met the U.S. legal requirements. "We recognize that more needs to be done to improve the human rights performance of the armed forces," he said.

"It is shameful that the U.S. State Department, which designated armed rebel groups and paramilitary forces as 'terrorists,' somehow doesn't see the glaring human rights abuses that permeate Colombian society," Amnesty International USA's executive director, William F. Schulz, said in a statement.