

Open Letter from the Latin American Studies Association

The Executive Council of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA) wishes to express its profound concern regarding recent remarks by former president and current senator Álvaro Uribe Vélez. On November 9, 2017, ex-Pres. Uribe issued a statement on Twitter in which he described the “writings” of historian Mauricio Archila Neira as “an apology for terrorism.” Professor Archila, a distinguished member of LASA, is a leading figure in the Colombian historical community; his voluminous scholarship has made crucial contributions to the discussion of the nation’s social and political challenges, and he has worked to expand historical studies in Colombia even under the most difficult circumstances. In doing so, his teaching and research have contributed to advancing peaceful means of addressing national problems.

Prof. Archila’s historical scholarship is widely respected in Latin America, Europe, and the United States, and his serious and careful research has been recognized with multiple awards and book prizes. Most recently, he served as co-chair of the program committee for the 2017 LASA meetings in Lima, Peru, attended by 6,620 fellow scholars; his appointment to this position is an indication of the esteem in which he is held by his colleagues in the Latin American studies community.

All scholars must be prepared for critical responses to their work, but the comments by ex-President Uribe do not represent a critical engagement with Prof. Archila’s scholarship. Rather, they were meant to intimidate and silence an important scholarly voice in the Colombian academy. Such comments would be irresponsible for someone in ex-Pres. Uribe’s position under any circumstances; in the current Colombian context, we regard them as reckless. In light of this, we wish to register our strong support for Prof. Archila and our dismay at this attempt to silence him.

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