



Wednesday July 9, 2008

Approve trade deal with Colombia

COLOMBIA WON respect last week with its stunning rescue of 15 hostages, including three U.S. citizens, who had been held by anti-government guerrillas.

The United States should do more than merely applaud. It should approve a trade agreement that House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has blocked, citing thin excuses. The most substantial is that Colombia's government has been tied to thugs who have killed union members.

But as New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof wrote in April, Colombia's government has cracked down so much that "Last year, the murder rate for union members was 4 per 100,000, reaching levels far below the homicide rate for the general public."

Colombian President Alvaro Uribe's government has done much, against daunting odds, to demonstrate that it is on the side of the rule of law. Meanwhile, the FARC guerrillas who kept Ingrid Betancourt and others chained by the neck to trees in the jungle for the last several years - and which still holds more than 700 such hostages - is clearly allied with those who mean the United States ill, such as Venezuela's Hugo Chavez.

Colombian goods already enter this country duty-free; the pact currently blocked in Congress would open Colombia to U.S. exports. Rep. Jim Clyburn, third ranking Democrat in the House, should prevail upon Speaker Pelosi to let the trade deal go through.