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GLOBAL UNIONS

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Colombia: Global Unions condemn expulsion of international trade unionists

Brussels 2 November 2004 (ICFTU Online): The international trade union movement today expressed its outrage at the expulsion of four international union representatives from Colombia on 30 October and 1 November, on the order of the government of President Alvaro Uribe Velez. It is understood that the Uribe government has drawn up a list of trade union representatives banned from entering the country, and that this list includes persons who took part in an international solidarity mission* to Colombia in September, to press the Uribe government to bring an end to the killing of Colombian trade unionists and the other means of anti-union repression which are rife in the country. Colombia has had a notorious record of violence and discrimination against trade unionists over many years, with more than 50 trade unionists murdered already this year.

The four, Victor Baez Mosqueira, General Secretary of the ICFTU regional organisation for the Americas ICFTU-ORIT, Antonio Rodriguez Fritz (International Transport Workers' Federation), Rodolfo Benitez (Union Network International) and Cameron Duncan (Public Services International), were due to attend an Americas region trade union coordination meeting. Immigration officials detained them on arrival in the country and expelled them, in contradiction to Colombia's normal visa entry requirements. Three of them had taken part in a meeting with President Uribe during the September solidarity mission, where the President assured the delegation of his government's full commitment to trade union rights, and thanked them for their interest in the situation inside the country.

In another development, union leaders from Great Britain, Ireland and Spain who had arrived in Colombia to attend a meeting of women trade unionists had their 60-day visas cancelled and were permitted to stay only three days in the country.

The ICFTU and its Global Unions partners are writing to formally protest to President Uribe at his government's actions, which constitute a "totally unacceptable attempt to deny Colombian workers their legitimate right to international representation", according to ICFTU General Secretary Guy Ryder, who added "the Colombian government has a responsibility to protect trade unionists from violence and intimidation and to ensure that fundamental rights, enshrined in International Labour Organisation Conventions, are fully respected. This action by the government is entirely in the wrong direction, and we call upon President Uribe to restore the right of entry to all those affected, and to face up to its obligations under international law".

The expulsion of the trade union leaders will also be brought formally to the International Labour Organisation, which is this week examining a number of complaints from the trade union movement over violations of freedom of association in the country.

Global Unions' member organisations in countries around the world will also be raising the case with their national governments, and with intergovernmental and regional bodies including the European Union. Meetings with the Colombian Ambassadors in Brussels, Geneva and other cities are also being sought.

* For a copy of the report of the September Solidarity Conference organised by the ICFTU and the World Confederation of Labour, see:

<http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991220590&Language=EN>

The ICFTU represents 148 million workers in 234 affiliated organisations in 152 countries and territories. ICFTU is also a member of Global Unions: <http://www.global-unions.org>

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