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INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS & WORLD CONFEDERATION OF LABOUR

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Tripartite agreement on a permanent ILO presence in Colombia

Geneva, 2 June 2006: The International Labour Conference (ILC, annual meeting of the ILO) welcomed the tripartite agreement concluded in Geneva, on 1 June, between the three Colombian trade union centres (CUT, CGT, CTC), Colombian employers' representatives and the country's government. The six-point agreement reached on the second day of the Conference guarantees a permanent ILO presence in Colombia and met with a standing ovation from Conference delegates.

Among the functions to be carried out by the ILO representation in Colombia is the promotion of decent work. It will place emphasis on the defence of the fundamental rights of workers, trade unionists and trade union organisations, and most particularly the right to protection of life, to trade union freedom, freedom of association and expression, collective bargaining, and employers' freedom of enterprise.

The Agreement also provides for the convening of the National Consultation Committee on Social and Wage Policies, and the invitation of the ILO representative to its meetings.

The document signed on also deals with the impunity enjoyed by the murderers of Colombian trade union activists and leaders (over two thousand trade unionists have been killed over the last decade). The investigations into such murders only very rarely lead to the sentencing of the perpetrators; the ILO has expressed deep concern over this unacceptable impunity. Under the terms of the agreement, the social partners and the Colombian government also committed to closely observing the findings of a new special investigation unit created by the Attorney General with a view to inquiring into the murders and illegal detentions of trade union leaders and workers.

Luc Cortebeeck, the president of the Belgian trade union confederation CSC and the workers' group spokesperson within the ILC Committee on the Application of Standards (CAS), stated that this agreement represents "the fruit of twenty years' work by trade unions within the ILO". It, in fact, means that the government will not have to be called to appear before the CAS this year. The Committee on the Application of Standards, a key legal body of the ILO, has been examining the case of Colombia without interruption for almost twenty years. On addressing the Committee following its welcome of the agreement, Cortebeeck said that it should serve as "an inspiring example of the possibilities offered by the ILO and by social dialogue in general, and, in particular, the ILO missions in the countries concerned". Ed Potter, the employers' spokesperson within the CAS said that the agreement "shows there is a better alternative to the discussions within the Standards Committee, that is, tripartite agreements". Potter called on the countries that have avoided being called before the CAS this year to resolve their problems by means of such agreements.

Both Cortebeeck and Potter had taken part in a high-level tripartite

mission of the ILO, which visited Colombia in October 2005 in the wake of a last minute compromise reached by the Standards Committee during the previous International Labour Conference. The tripartite mission was closely followed by Colombian and international trade unions. The ICFTU and the World Confederation of Labour had sent observers to accompany this unprecedented ILO mission.

The Colombian trade unions expressed their view that the permanent monitoring to be carried out by the ILO was extremely important and that they expected "significant progress to result from the implementation of this agreement".

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The WCL represents 30 million workers around the world.

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