

ITUC OnLine

015/211106

Continuing Core Labour Standards Violations in Colombia

Brussels, 22 November 2006 (ITUC OnLine): A new ITUC report (http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/Colombia_20-11-06_final-2.pdf) on core labour standards in Colombia has been released today to coincide with Colombia's trade policy review at the WTO on 22 and 24 November.

According to the report, Colombia holds the sad record of being the country in which the most men and women have been murdered as a direct result of their trade union work. In 2005, 70 trade unionists were assassinated. In 2006, up to the beginning of November, 53 trade unionists were killed. Acts of violence against trade unionists further include kidnappings, attempted assassinations, disappearances, threats, detentions, tortures and forced displacement. The report further argues that over the last 4 years the number of violations of human and trade union rights by state security bodies has increased. *"The systematic and selective violence against trade unionists in a climate of impunity remains the largest obstacle to workers' rights in Colombia today"*, said Guy Ryder, General Secretary of the ITUC.

The report highlights the fact that in practice, few workers in Colombia can enjoy their fundamental rights to form and join a union, to bargain collectively and to strike, despite the fact that those were all enshrined in Colombia's 1991 Constitution. Employers' illegal anti-union acts usually go unpunished while the government's practices during restructuring and privatisation of public companies can only be considered deliberate anti-union strategies. In fact the government has on many occasions sought to weaken the unions, tarnish their image and convince workers against unionising, argues the report.

The report further underlines the persistent level of discrimination in both access to employment and remuneration against women, Afro-Colombians and indigenous people. In addition the report finds that the government's response to eliminating the worst forms of child labour, affecting half a million children has been wholly insufficient.

"The trade union situation in Colombia is a great source of concern for the international trade unions movement and we do hope that the opening of an ILO permanent representation in this country will bring about some substantial and sustained improvements in the life of millions of workers in Colombia," concluded Ryder.

On November 1, the ITUC represents 168 million workers in 154 countries and territories and has 307 national affiliates.

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