

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (ITUC)

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Guatemala: Pressure Mounts on Authorities Over Murder of Pedro Zamora

Brussels, 8 February 2007 (ICTU OnLine): With the conclusion of a joint mission of the International Transport Workers' Union Federation (ITF) and the ITUC to Guatemala, pressure is mounting on the authorities of the Central American country over the assassination of Port Workers' Union leader Pedro Zamora Álvarez on 15 January (see <http://www.ituc-csi.org/spip.php?article645>).

Having submitted a formal complaint to the International Labour Organisation, the ITF and ITUC are demanding that a full investigation into Zamora's murder be carried out.. The mission was informed that the police had neglected to properly secure the crime scene and missed vital evidence, and that investigators had failed to follow up information which could lead to the real perpetrators of the crime. A climate of impunity prevails in Guatemala, with hundreds upon hundreds of murders in recent years remaining unsolved. Zamora had been leading a campaign to stop the government's plans for the restructuring of the port of Quetzal, proposing instead a programme of investment and modernisation to increase efficiency and to secure decent employment for the port's workforce.

Numerous other trade union representatives, including from Zamora's union STEPQ (Trade Union of Quetzal Port Enterprise Workers), have been receiving threats and intimidation, and the ITF and ITUC are demanding that the government take responsibility for their protection, as well as ensuring the reinstatement of 9 union members at the Port who were dismissed four months ago due to their union activities. The mission, which took place from 28 January to 2 February, held talks with a wide range of trade unionists, judicial and government authorities, the Quetzal port management, diplomats, politicians and human rights activists. It identified a continuing climate of criminal acts against trade unionists, and calls for sustained international pressure on the Guatemalan authorities to ensure full respect for internationally-recognised trade union and human rights. Guatemalan President Oscar Berger did not agree to meet the mission, nor has he responded to any of the correspondence from the ITF and ITUC concerning Zamora's murder.

"The murder of Pedro Zamora shows once again the callous disregard for fundamental rights in Guatemala, and the ease with which powerful interests are able to commit the most heinous crimes and escape unpunished", said ITUC General Secretary Guy Ryder. "Investors who are considering getting involved in the proposed privatisation of Quetzal Port or in other such ventures in Guatemala should think very hard before taking such a step, unless and until the government of President Berger Perdomo puts an end to the climate of terror against trade unionists and others who defend basic rights in Guatemala", he added.

The ITF and ITUC are also calling on other governments in the region and internationally, as well as international financial institutions, to put pressure on the Guatemalan authorities to ensure that human and trade union rights are fully respected and that the impunity which influential criminals enjoy is ended.

Founded on 1 November 2006, the ITUC represents 168 million workers in 153 countries and territories and has 304 national affiliates.

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