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INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION

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Guatemala: the violence continues

Brussels, 10 March 2008 (ITUC online): The ITUC expressed its profound shock and indignation at the assassination, on 2 March, of Miguel Ángel Ramírez, a member of the banana workers' union Sindicato de Trabajadores Bananeros del Sur (SITRABANSUR), which is affiliated to UNSITRAGUA.

Sitrabansur was founded on 15 July 2007 by a group of workers - including Miguel Ángel Ramírez - from the company Frutera Internacional Sociedad Anónima that produces bananas for the Chiquita brand. Four months after the workers had organised themselves the company obtained a list of all the founder members of the union and set about harassing and threatening them using its private security agents. Some were illegally detained as a means of pressurising them into resigning and at the end of November they were sacked from their jobs. Miguel Ángel Ramírez was forced to sign a resignation letter.

Further violations have taken place in the country. Four weeks ago the daughter of the General Secretary of SITRABANSUR was raped by armed men and the wife of Víctor Manuel Gómez, also a SITRABANSUR leader, was threatened by armed men who told her that if they did not find her husband they would have no other option than to kill his family.

On 1 March, the house of Carlos Carballo Cabrera, General Secretary of the Confederación de Unidad Sindical de Guatemala (CUSG) was shot at by armed men. The CUSG is one of the ITUC's 2 affiliated organisations in Guatemala, along with the CGT.

In a letter

(http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/asesinato_Miguel_Angel_Ramirez_SITRABANSUR.pdf) to the authorities of Guatemala, the ITUC urged President Álvaro Colom to take quick and effective action to identify the perpetrators of the murder of Miguel Ángel Ramírez, of the abuses against women in the families of SITRABANSUR leaders and of the attack on the house of Carlos Carballo Cabrera. The ITUC reminded Mr. Alvaro Colom of his commitment at the ITUC Conference on the role of trade union organisations in combating impunity on 29-31 January in Guatemala City to do everything possible to eradicate the violence against trade unionists and end the endemic impunity in Guatemala. "The full force of the law must be brought to bear on the guilty parties, so that these criminals are no longer buoyed by the prospect of impunity," stated Guy Ryder, General Secretary of the ITUC. "The violence must end now!"

The ITUC represents 168 million workers in 155 countries and territories and has 311 national affiliates. Website: <http://www.ituc-csi.org>
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