

Online

Colombia: 10 trade unionists murdered since the beginning of the year



Brussels, 20 March 2008: The International Trade Union Confederation is extremely concerned that there has been no let up in the murders, attempted murders and death threats in Colombia and that the authorities appear to be no nearer to carrying out a full investigation into the crimes committed almost daily against the trade union movement. The constant harassments, threats and attacks on trade union leaders have created an exceptionally difficult climate. So far this year, ten workers have paid with their lives for being trade unionists and for fighting to improve the lot of the Colombian working class. The murdered trade unionists come from all sectors, including teachers, bank and health workers. On 2 February José Martín Duarte Acero of the SINTRAMBIENTE union affiliated to the CGT was shot in the back while working in the Macarena National Park. He died a few minutes after telling his family what had happened on his cell phone. Rafael Boada, president of the Bucaramanga branch of the UNEB bank workers' union, was the target of an armed attack on 7 March. Two individuals on a motorbike shot at him twice, hitting his windscreen. Fortunately he escaped unharmed. He had already received several death threats.

Ironically, several of the murders took place around the march "For the Dignity of Victims" held in Colombia on 6 March with the support of the trade union movement as a tribute to—and in solidarity with—all the victims of arbitrary violence and the armed conflict and of course the families of the 2,574 assassinated trade unionists; with the over four million displaced persons, most of whom have lost all their land and possessions; with the 10,000 disappeared; with the hundreds of kidnap victims and with the thousands of victims of massacres and selective killings.

In a [letter to President Uribe \(ES - pdf\)](#) on behalf of the ITUC, the organisation's general secretary, Guy Ryder, urges him to carry out a full investigation into all the crimes and, above all, to take all necessary security measures to ensure that the death threats are not carried out. The same events were described in an official complaint by the ITUC to the International Labour Organisation against the Government of Colombia for repeated violations of freedom of association.

"There must be an end to all harassment of trade union members," says Guy Ryder. "Those responsible must be identified and tried by a competent and impartial court. The sanctions foreseen by law must be applied to ensure that such crimes cannot be committed with impunity and that Colombia workers can exercise their rights freely without putting their lives in danger."

The ITUC represents 168 million workers in 155 countries and territories and has 311 national affiliates.

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