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The ITUC Condemns the Death Threats Against an Activist for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Brussels, 4 April 2008: The ITUC strongly condemns the death threats made against the Bishop of San Marcos. On 31 March 2008 a nun in the city of San Marcos was stopped while driving her car by unknown individuals who used threatening behaviour and demanded that she deliver a death threat to Monsignor Álvaro Ramazzini, Bishop of San Marcos.

This is yet another act of intimidation against representatives of the Church and in particular against Monsignor Álvaro Ramazzini, chair of the Episcopal Conference of Guatemala and the Catholic Church's representative on the High Level Commission, formed to find agreements and strategies to tackle the thorny question of metal mining and the granting of licences in violation of ILO Convention 169 on indigenous and tribal peoples. Land is a highly conflictual and dangerous issue in Guatemala with some very recalcitrant landowners who oppose any questioning of their interests. Msgr. Ramazzini had opted firmly for helping the poor, unemployed peasants in his San Marcos diocese who have no access to land and had been working closely with human rights, trade union, indigenous and community organisations.

Msgr. Ramazzini was one of the keynote speakers at the ITUC's conference on the role of trade union organisations in the fight against impunity, held from 29 to 31 January 2008 in Guatemala City.

The international trade union movement is following events in Guatemala closely and has offered President Álvaro Colom its support in the struggle to establish the rule of law, under which the human and trade union rights are fully respected. On 1 April the ITUC general secretary wrote to Dr. Juan Somavia, director general of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), to ask him to lobby the United Nations and other international bodies for firm political support for the International Conference Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), a key institution in the fight against impunity.

In a letter addressed to President Álvaro Colom protesting at this serious incident (http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/Protesta_amenazas_de_muerte_contra_Monsenor_Ramazzini.pdf), Guy Ryder, general secretary of the ITUC, has asked the Guatemalan authorities to carry out immediately a full and impartial investigation into this latest death threat against Monsignor Ramazzini (a plan to assassinate him was discovered - fortunately in time -- in 2005) in order to find those intellectually responsible, bring them to justice and apply the sanctions foreseen by law. Guy Ryder also asked "that the necessary measures be taken to guarantee the safety and physical integrity of Monsignor Álvaro Ramazzini and to ensure that such threats cannot be carried out in a Guatemala where all citizens can freely enjoy their fundamental rights."

The ITUC represents 168 million workers in 155 countries and territories and has 311 national affiliates. For more information, please contact the ITUC Press Department on +32 2 224 0204 or +32 476 621 018

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