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INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION

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Colombia: No reduction in assassinations and death threats

Brussels, 18 June 2008 (ITUC Online): Once more the International Trade Union Confederation is forced to note that the assassinations, attempted murders, attacks and death threats to which Colombian trade unionists have continually been exposed are not coming to an end in the country.

On 12 March, José Gregorio Astros Amaya, a prison officer at Cartago prison in Valle department and one of the leaders of the union ASEINPEC, was assassinated. On 22 March, Adolfo González Montes, a union leader from the Barrancas branch of the coal miners' union SINTRACARBON, was tortured and then killed in his home. On 16 April, the leader of SINDESENA, Jesús Heberto Caballero, was assassinated.

On 1 May, José Domingo Florez, an employee of the Coca Cola bottling factory in Bucaramanga received a death threat. He and Luis Eduardo Garcia, also a leader of the SINALTRAINAL union, had been receiving threats for several months, along with other SINALTRAINAL leaders based in Bucaramanga. On 23 April, in a complex incident, it seems that two plain clothes policemen protected by uniformed colleagues attempted an attack on Jorge Gamboa, President of the national organisation USO. Daniel Rico Serpa, General Secretary of the USO national executive committee in Cartagena, and Rubén Caballero Ariza, President of one of the coal miners' unions in Cerrejón, Valledupar Cesar, also received repeated death threats during May.

In a letter to President Uribe (http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/Asesinatos_atentados_y_amenazas_jun_08.pdf) the ITUC urged the Colombian authorities to carry out a thorough investigation into all the crimes that have been committed, insisting in particular that it take the security measures needed to prevent the death threats against Colombian trade unionists from being carried out. The ITUC will also be lodging an official complaint with the Committee on Freedom of Association of the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

“It is vital that this violent situation ends”, stated Guy Ryder, General Secretary of the ITUC. “Urgent measures must be taken and a thorough investigation must be made into the almost daily crimes against trade unionists, so that Colombian trade unionists can exercise their fundamental rights without risking their lives.”

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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