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INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (ITUC)

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Colombia: national and multinational companies violate workers' rights

Brussels, 4 July 2008: A number of national and multinational enterprises are waging a systematic campaign to rid themselves of trade unions. The Spanish multinational Union Fenosa and its Colombian distribution company Electricaribe, for example, are deploying a strategy of harassment, persecution, repression and illegal actions against its workers in a bid to oust the union, according to reports from the Colombian electricity workers' union Sintraelecol. Fake proceedings are also being used to dismiss union members, to fulfil the monthly quota set by the top bosses in Spain with a view reducing the number of workers affiliated to Sintraelecol and covered by the collective agreement.

Good Year Colombia is deploying similar tactics to force workers to withdraw from the tire workers' union Sintraincapla, blatantly violating ILO Convention 87, which Colombia has ratified.

At the company in charge of waste management in the Colombian capital, Relleno Sanitario Doña Juana, where 90% of the staff belongs to a workers' cooperative (Cooperativa de Trabajo Asociado - CTA), the 150 workers learnt that their Cali-based CTA was to be folded and they would have to sign up with another CTA based in Medellín. They have still not been informed about the fate of the contributions made to the Cali CTA.

Carbosan, a company controlled by Carboandes and the Santa Marta Port Company, has been denounced by CUT, one of the ITUC's Colombian affiliates, following its exploitation of seventy workers who were forced to work seven night shifts followed by seven day shifts and then dismissed without pay. The workers had attempted to form a union but the Social Protection Ministry, arguing that as temporary workers they had no organising rights, rejected their application.

"Such practices are unacceptable," said Guy Ryder, General Secretary of the ITUC. "It is essential that fundamental workers' rights and the ILO Conventions ratified by Colombia be respected."

In a letter to the Colombian authorities (http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/violaciones_de_empresas_nacionales_y_multinacionales.pdf), the International Trade Union Confederation called on the government and employers to respect the national Constitution and the ILO Conventions that have been ratified by Colombia and are therefore legally binding. It also insisted on the urgent need for the government and the business sector to respect the Tripartite Agreement on Freedom of Association and Democracy and to create a more favourable climate for the exercise of trade union 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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