

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION

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Guatemala: trade unionists threatened and intimidated

Brussels, 26 November 2008: Guatemala continues to be the scene of union bashing, threats and intimidation, on this occasion in the municipality of Zacapa. The ITUC has strongly condemned these trade union rights violations.

The incidents began on 23 October when members of the Zapata municipal workers' union SINTRAMUZAC decided to hold a peaceful demonstration after work in front of the municipal authority buildings, in support of their demand for the negotiation of the collective agreement on working conditions. Members of the army immediately appeared on the scene and threatened and intimidated Axel Alberto Soto Ramírez, the union's labour and disputes secretary, together with other members of the Executive Committee.

The union had decided to hold the demonstration in response to Mayor Edgar Orellana Barrera's rejection of its official request to negotiate the collective agreement. Having failed to table negotiations through administrative channels, the matter was transferred to the Labour Tribunal, in conformity with the labour legislation. This process has been undertaken in a peaceful manner and with respect for the law, which deemed the demonstration to be legal.

In a more worrying episode, on 4 November, at a meeting in the Mayor's office to discuss trade union matters, the Mayor indicated to SINTRAMUZAC representatives Heidy Azucena Hernández Verbena and Noelia Aracely Morales Díaz that there were people ready to "do them harm".

"It is totally unacceptable that a representative of the State is involved in a wave of threats and intimidation in a country governed by the rule of law," declared Guy Ryder, General Secretary of the ITUC. "In a democracy, trade unions have the right to organise and to collective bargaining."

In a letter to the authorities, http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/violencia_y_atropellos_en_Guatemala.pdf, the ITUC urged the Mayor of Zacapa, Mr Edgar Orellana Barrera, to urgently and legally clarify the information as to the identity of the people ready to harm trade unionists and to bring them to justice. It also called on the Guatemalan State to take every step necessary to guarantee the protection of all trade unionists and their families, along with all the workers of Guatemala.

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

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