

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (ITUC)

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Colombia: Mass Grave Discovered in La Macarena

Brussels, 28 April 2010 (ITUC OnLine): The ITUC has expressed grave concern over the discovery of a mass grave in the town of La Macarena, in Colombia, as well as condemning the assassination of Johnny Hurtado, a human rights activist who denounced the mass grave's existence. According to the information received by the ITUC, Hurtado, a former trade union activist, had already been forced to move away from his home after receiving death threats.

The Attorney General's office estimates at 2000 the number of unidentified bodies in the mass grave. The figure is particularly worrying given that well over a hundred Colombian trade unionists have disappeared in recent years.

Recent revelations regarding extrajudicial executions, including from the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and her Special Rapporteur, have uncovered the Colombian army's involvement in what the UN has described as the "systematic" killing of Colombian civilians. The mass grave is located next to the largest military base in the region.

In a letter http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/Fosa_comun_en_La_Macarena_Colombia.pdf to the Colombian authorities, the ITUC urged the Colombian government to order an immediate, thorough and transparent investigation into what has happened in La Macarena; to carry out an urgent inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the murder of Johnny Hurtado and bring those responsible to justice; to order that the civil authorities close off the area surrounding the mass grave until a thorough investigation has been carried out, to avoid any tampering with the material evidence; and to allow international observers to monitor the investigation of La Macarena grave and an inter-institutional inspection mission to visit the site as soon as possible. The mission should include representatives from the relevant bodies of the Colombian state, as well as representatives of human and trade union rights organisations, the local communities around La Macarena, and members of the international and diplomatic community.

"The situation in Colombia is extremely worrying," said Guy Ryder, general secretary of the ITUC. "It is vital that an end be brought to impunity, so that trade unionists and human rights defenders can exercise their rights without putting their lives at risk, and so that those responsible for these crimes are brought to justice.

The ITUC represents 176 million workers in 155 countries and territories and has 312 national affiliates. <http://www.ituc-csi.org> and <http://www.youtube.com/ITUCCSI>
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