

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION

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Colombia: No Change in Routine of Threatening and Eliminating Trade Unionists

Brussels, 2 June 2010: Violence is becoming totally routine in Colombia. Once again, the ITUC, together with its regional organisation for the Americas, TUCA, and its Colombian affiliates, the CUT, CGT and CTC, have strongly condemned and expressed their deepest concern over the murders of Leslien Torcoroma Peñaranda Blanco and Francisco Atonio Abello Rebollo, and the threats levelled against Daíro Rúa, branch president of the mining and energy workers' union SINTRAMIENERGETICA, affiliated to CUT.

According to the information received by the ITUC, the trade unionists were murdered on account of their trade union activities. Leslien Blanco, a teacher affiliated to ASINORT, was murdered on her way to work. Francisco Abello had taken part, along with 185 workers, in the strike held between December 2009 and January 2010 in support of the demand for the recognition of the agricultural workers' union SINTRAINAGRO and the signing of a collective agreement.

The CUT trade union centre had intervened at the time of the strike, appealing to the Colombian president and vice president, as well as the Social Protection, Interior and Justice Ministries, to prevent the use of police violence and force to disperse the striking workers and to allow them to freely exercise their right to freedom of association and collective bargaining. It succeeded in averting another massacre of workers and contributed to the signing of the agreement that was finally concluded between SINTRAINAGRO and the management of Palo Alto. But there is no end to the murders.

Threats are also part of the tragic reality facing trade unionists in Colombia. Daíro Rúa was threatened and declared a 'military target' after opposing the sale of assets belonging to the workers.

In a letter http://www.ituc-csi.org/ecrire/?exec=articles&id_article=6849 to the Colombian authorities, the ITUC urged President Álvaro Uribe, his government, and the relevant departmental and municipal authorities, to take every action necessary to ensure that these incidents are investigated and that all those responsible for these abominable crimes are identified and brought to justice.

"Any form of violence is unacceptable, not least attempts on the lives of those exercising their most fundamental rights to defend working people," insisted ITUC General Secretary Guy Ryder.

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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