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The ITUC Condemns the Murders of Two More Teachers in Colombia

Brussels, 24 June 2011 (ITUC OnLine): The ITUC condemns and expresses its deep sorrow at the murders of two more teachers in Colombia: Dionis Alfredo Sierra Vergara was murdered on 15 May and Alejandro José Peñata López on 20 June. Both were members of the Asociación de Maestros de Córdoba - ADEMACOR (teachers' association of Córdoba), affiliated to the CUT.

Dionis Alfredo Sierra Vergara was a primary school teacher. According to on-the-spot witnesses, Sierra Vergara received a call on his mobile phone; he went outside to answer it and was attacked by unknown armed assailants who shot him three times causing his immediate death. Sierra had been celebrating Teacher's Day and a colleague's birthday with his fellow teachers.

Alejandro José Peñata disappeared as he left the school where he worked as coordinator. His family and friends launched a search and he was found in a small village at approximately 18:30. His body displayed signs of torture and he had been hung with barbed wire. His motorbike and documents were discovered at the scene which makes it clear that this was not a robbery.

The ITUC condemns the constant persecution and violence against teachers in Colombia. In the Department of Córdoba alone, this new murder brings to 20 the total number of male and female teachers killed from December 2008 to date. The context of almost total impunity for these murders has led to an alarming humanitarian crisis in the education sector and has put teaching and trade union actions at risk and clearly refutes the Colombian governments' statements in international forums about human rights' improvements.

In a letter to President Santos (http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/carta_de_protesta_asesinato_de_dos_educadores_junio.pdf), the ITUC urged the Colombian authorities to act with the utmost speed to ensure that these crimes are investigated and solved and that all those responsible for these crimes, either directly or indirectly, are punished. "It is necessary and urgent to break the vicious circle of violence and impunity that reigns in Colombia. We want to see the human rights' improvements announced by the Colombian government now" said the ITUC General Secretary Sharan Burrow.

The ITUC represents 175 million workers in 151 countries and territories and has 305 national affiliates. <http://www.ituc-csi.org> and <http://www.youtube.com/ITUCCSI>

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