

American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations



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February 1, 2012

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Obama:

I am writing on behalf of the over twelve million members of the AFL-CIO to express my profound shock upon learning that reports confirm the killing of two more Colombian trade unionists with two other alleged killings still under investigation.

Reports indicate that on January 9, Victor Manuel Hilarion Palacios, a member of the union SINTRAPAZ (part of the Colombian Agricultural Workers Union known as FENSUAGRO), was travelling for work from San Juan de Sumapaz towards Rio Nevado when he was allegedly killed by Colombian army troops. According to reports, the soldiers who later delivered his body to the Technical Investigation Unit (CTI) of the Fiscalia office in the town of Villavicencio stated that he had been killed in crossfire – yet the colleagues and relatives who went to collect his body discovered it bore signs that he had been brutally beaten and tortured. In February 2010 Mr. Palacios' name and photograph were found on a list of 18 social activists accused of being "FARC militia" in the area.

On January 17, Mauricio Redondo, a local leader of the Unión Sindical Obrera (USO), the national oil workers' union, was murdered in Putumayo along with his spouse, leaving five children orphaned. As you know from previous letters, the USO has been receiving death threats from paramilitary groups for many months. It now appears that these threats have been carried out.

Two days later, on January 19, Blandon Gonzales Alexander, a member of the Board of Directors of the national municipal workers' union, SINTRAENTEDDIMCCO, was allegedly brutally murdered in the Valle de Cauca.

On January 26, in Barranquilla, reports indicate that Ricardo Ramón Paublott Gómez, a leader from the Sinaltrainal, the National Union of Food Workers, who was employed by the National Industry of Sodas -Industria Nacional de Gaseosas S.A. (Coca Cola) was murdered by gunfire.

I am both alarmed and outraged by these murders, especially as they have taken place in such quick succession. I fear that the passage of the Colombia FTA has now given a green light to the enemies of democratic labor unions in Colombia to launch a new wave of anti-union violence, just as happened in Guatemala after the signing of DR-CAFTA.

What's more, Human Rights Watch has recently issued a report (enclosed), which concludes that the U.S. State Department is not enforcing the human rights conditions imposed upon U.S. aid to Colombia. This is very troubling, and I hope you will ask the State Department to look into the report's findings and respond in a timely way.

I urge you to postpone indefinitely the implementation of the FTA, making it clear to the Colombian government that it will not be implemented until such anti-union violence ceases and workers can exercise their rights to organize and bargain without fear. I further urge you to ensure that the State Department and other U.S. agencies comply in full with the human rights conditions imposed on military aid to Colombia and to further investigate the recent killings of union leaders and activists, which are intensifying.

Sincerely,


Richard L. Trumka
President