



Campaign to Stop Killer Coke

Cooper Station, P.O. Box 1004
New York, NY 10276-1004
(718) 852-2808
stopkillercoke@aol.com
www.killercoke.org
www.corporatecampaign.org



March 2, 2005

Dear New York University Senators:

Last night on the NYU campus, in a packed lecture hall, members of the NYU community heard New York City Council Member Hiram Monserrate, International Labor Rights Fund executive director and highly regarded human rights attorney Terry Collingsworth, and Javier Correa, president of SINALTRAINAL which represents workers in Coca-Cola bottling plants in Colombia. The attendees heard shocking accounts of murder, torture, kidnapping and other crimes that are part of Coca-Cola's business operations in Colombia.

The Campaign to Stop Killer Coke has been organizing a worldwide campaign to put pressure on The Coca-Cola Co. to protect the safety and rights of workers at its Colombian bottling plants and to hold Coca-Cola accountable for its complicity in gross human rights abuses.

The back cover of "Soft Drink, Hard Labour," a booklet published in 1987 by the Latin America Bureau in England, states:

"For nine years the 450 workers at the **Coca-Cola** bottling plant in Guatemala City fought a battle with their employers for their jobs, their trade union and their lives. Three times they occupied the plant — on the last occasion for thirteen months. Three General Secretaries of their union were murdered and five other workers killed. Four more were kidnapped and have disappeared.

"Against all the odds they survived, thanks to their own extraordinary courage and help from fellow trade unionists in Guatemala and around the world. A huge international campaign of protests and boycotts was central to their struggle. As a result, the **Coca-Cola** workers forced concessions from one of the world's largest multinational food giants and kept the Guatemalan trade union movement alive through a dark age of government repression."

What happened at **Coca-Cola** bottling plants in the 70s and early 80s in Guatemala is happening in Colombia today. The Campaign to Stop Killer Coke is a movement of "we's," that is, a movement of individuals, organizations and institutions around the world. We plan to put an end to history repeating itself once and for all. We hope that the New York University community will be a part of this effort.

The International Labor Rights Fund (www.LaborRights.org) and the United Steelworkers of America filed a lawsuit against The Coca-Cola Co. and its Colombian bottlers in 2001 on behalf of SINALTRAINAL, several of its members and the survivors of Isidro Gil, one of its murdered officers. The lawsuit charges that Coca-Cola bottlers "contracted with or otherwise directed paramilitary security forces that utilized extreme violence and murdered, tortured, unlawfully detained or otherwise silenced trade union leaders." After Isidro Gil was murdered and the union crushed at his plant, wages dropped from \$380 a month to \$130.

In January 2004, New York City Council Member and former police officer Hiram Monserrate led a delegation on a 10-day, fact-finding tour to Colombia to investigate allegations of human rights violations by Coca-Cola. As one member said upon returning, "We heard one story after another of torture and injustice. The sheer number of these testimonials was overwhelming." The delegation issued a scathing report in April concluding that "Coca-Cola is complicit in human rights abuses of its workers in Colombia" — and its "complicity is deepened by its repeated pattern of bringing criminal charges against union activists who have spoken out about the company's collusion with paramilitaries." (The full report and other supporting information can be read by going to www.KillerCoke.org and clicking on the Monserrate report and appendices.)

Colombia's President Alvaro Uribe, multinationals like Coca-Cola, and paramilitary groups all have one thing in common: they don't want any social movement — particularly a strong labor and human rights movement — to challenge their authority or brutality.

Numerous colleges, unions, human rights groups and others have taken strong stands against Coke's abuses. The Service Employees International Union, the largest union in the AFL-CIO; UNISON, the largest union in Great Britain; and the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance, the largest union in Northern Ireland, passed resolutions calling for a boycott of all Coca-Cola products until human rights abuses in Colombia's bottling plants are resolved. This follows strong actions by other unions and labor councils throughout the world. Recently, the California Federation of Teachers, the Communications Workers of America and the American Postal Workers Union passed resolutions calling for boycotts and other actions against Coca-Cola.

The Labor Council for Latin American Advancement (LCLAA), representing the interests of 1.7 million Latino workers who are members of a union or labor association in the 50 states and Puerto Rico, passed a motion rebuking The Coca-Cola Co. at their national convention. The motion called for handing back to Coca-Cola its \$10,000 sponsorship.

Nine colleges and universities have terminated vendor and pouring contracts leading to the removal of Coke machines and all Coke products from the campuses. In Jersey City, St. Peter's Prep, a Jesuit high school, has just decided to remove all Coke products from its school. Many more schools are expected to take similar action since we have campaigns operating on about 90 campuses. One of the largest food coops in the U.S., the Park Slope Food Coop in Brooklyn, New York, voted to remove all Coke products from its shelves. Several pubs and restaurants have taken similar action. In addition, human rights organizations, such as Veterans for Peace, SOAWatch, Witnesses for Peace and the India Resource Center have condemned and continue to organize against Coca-Cola's complicity in human rights abuses.

In a letter dated October 14, 2004, the Office of New York City Comptroller William C. Thompson, Jr. on behalf of the New York City Employees' Retirement System and the New York City Teachers' Retirement System informed Coke that because the company had failed to respond adequately to their concerns, the pension funds were filing a shareholder resolution calling for "an independent investigation of allegations made against Coca-Cola bottling plants in Colombia." The funds own 5,257,217 shares of common stock.

After the Gill-Montague Regional Schools District Board in Massachusetts voted to reject a seven-year contract with Coca-Cola, board member Sally Shaw wrote: "I stand by my vote. Only when public officials begin standing up and acting on conscience, will the abuses of the multinational corporations and the politicians who benefit from them be challenged. It is an honor to be the first school district to turn down a contract with Killer Coke."

The World of Coca-Cola is a world of lies, deception, immorality, corruption, and gross human rights and environmental abuses. It's a company whose crimes and misdeeds include:

- * Benefiting from hazardous child labor in sugar cane fields in El Salvador as documented by Human Rights Watch (<http://www.hrw.org/children/labor/elsalvador/>)
 - * Aggressive marketing to children of nutritionally worthless and damaging products
 - * Turning farmland into wasteland through the overexploitation and pollution of water sources in India (www.indiaresource.org)
 - * Opposition to environmentally-sound bottle deposit bills
 - * History of racial discrimination
 - * Anti-worker policies
 - * Fraudulent business practices
- (See "How Credible Is Coke" -- <http://www.killercoke.org/pdf/coke-abuses.pdf>)

In light of this horrific record of abuse, we believe that no university should allow any Coca-Cola products to be sold or advertised on its campus, regardless of the economic incentive. We urge New York University to take appropriate action and send the strongest possible message to The Coca-Cola Company and its bottlers that they must act as responsible corporate citizens before they can do business with respectable institutions. **We hope that the members of the All-University Senate will act expeditiously and vote in support of the decisions by various NYU student body councils which voted to recommend a campus-wide ban on the sale of Coca-Cola products. As stated by NYU student Erin Keskeny, "we have to take action and the action available to us is a boycott . . . if we do take action, we can save lives."**

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Ray Rogers
Director
Campaign to Stop Killer Coke