



Campaign to Stop Killer Coke

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Anthony Romero
Executive Director
American Civil Liberties Union
125 Broad Street
New York, NY 10004

Dear Mr. Romero:

We have been informed that you will be delivering the keynote address at the banquet of the National Assn. of Hispanic Journalists (NAHJ) on February 16 — for this we applaud you. However, we are also aware that The Coca-Cola Co. is a “Dean Level” sponsor of the banquet.

In 2001, the International Labor Rights Fund (ILRF) and the United Steelworkers filed an Alien Tort Claims lawsuit against The Coca-Cola Co. and its bottlers in Colombia on behalf of SINALTRAINAL (National Food Industry Workers Union), several of its members and the survivors of Isidro Gil one of its murdered officers. The lawsuit charges that Coke bottlers in Colombia “contracted with or otherwise directed paramilitary security forces that utilized extreme violence and murdered, tortured, unlawfully detained or otherwise silenced trade union leaders.” The Coca-Cola System has also been under fire for environmental and human rights abuses in India and racial discrimination in the United States. In addition, the ILRF has recently filed a lawsuit against Coke for labor abuses in Turkey.

We are concerned that civil rights leaders such as yourself and organizations such as the NAHJ are being linked to Coca-Cola, which is the object of a huge and growing worldwide campaign.

We have seen noteworthy Latino leaders and organizations take a stand regarding Coke’s human rights, labor and environmental abuses, including:

1. **New York City Council Member Hiram Monserrate** led a factfinding mission to Colombia in January 2004. The mission included a number of Hispanics, including at least two Colombians. His report stated: “The delegation found both the quantity and the nature of Coca-Cola workers' allegations shocking and compelling. It seems indisputable that Coke workers have been systematically persecuted for their union activity. It seems equally evident that the company has allowed if not itself orchestrated the human rights violations of its workers, and it has benefited economically from those violations which have severely weakened the workers' union and their bargaining power. In the face of this evidence, Coca-Cola's continued insistence that it bears no responsibility whatsoever for the terror campaigns against its workers is highly disturbing, as is its complete failure to investigate company ties to the paramilitaries...” (see report at: www.killercoke.org/report.htm)

2. On August 27, 2004, the **Labor Council for Latin American Advancement (LCLAA)**, a constituency group of the AFL-CIO, 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 in Albuquerque, NM.

Upon arriving at the LCLAA convention, delegates learned that The Coca-Cola Co. was a co-sponsor of their convention. A motion was overwhelmingly passed that called for handing back to Coca-Cola its \$10,000 sponsorship (for more information, contact Sonia Ivany at: sivany@nysaflcio.org or 212-777-6040)

3. **University of Massachusetts professor and poet Martin Espada** stated during a poetry reading at Kansas University on March 10, 2005: "After giving the matter serious thought, I have decided that I cannot accept funds from Coca-Cola due to the company's labor record in Colombia... I cannot in good conscience accept monies from Coca-Cola or have my name associated with the company." He then stated that he would send Coke's stipend for the reading to SINALTRAINAL.

4. **WBAI "Wakeup Call" host Mario Murillo** emceed a standing-room-only forum on January 28, 2006 in Jackson Heights, Queens, during which SINALTRAINAL President Luis Javier Correa and Colombian exile Luis Adolfo Cardona spoke about The Coca-Cola Company's complicity in the intimidation, murder, torture and kidnapping of union leaders in Colombia.

We would ask anyone concerned with human rights to make it clear that they oppose The Coca-Cola Company's abuses and demand that the company's policymakers agree to a truly independent investigation of the charges by legitimate human rights organizations free of Coke's sponsorship and control. Many universities, such as the University of Michigan and New York University, as well as NYC Comptroller William Thompson in a shareholder resolution on behalf of New York City employee pension funds, have demanded this. There are campaigns against Coke on more than 140 campuses, of which 23 have already removed Coke products from their campuses, including Union Theological Seminary, New York University, Rutgers University and University of Michigan.

Some of the largest labor unions worldwide have decided to remove Coke machines from their facilities and to boycott all Coke products, including the Service Employees International Union, the American Postal Workers Union and New York State United Teachers in the U.S., UNISON in the UK and the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance.

Our campaign will be present at the site of the banquet on the 16th to make our concerns public to journalists attending the NAHJ event.

Please contact us if you have any questions. I hope you will give our concerns serious consideration.

Sincerely,

Ray Rogers
Director
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For more information:

1. Enclosed is a DVD that includes the film "State of the Union" produced in Colombia (11 minutes) and a WB11 NYC television feature on the Campaign to Stop Killer Coke called "Coca-Cola Faces Human Rights Violations." (six minutes) Interviewed in the WB11 segment are New York City Council Member Hiram Monserrate, New York City Comptroller William Thompson, American Postal Workers Union

(APWU) Secretary-Treasurer Terry Stapleton, Hofstra University student leader Vanessa Cudabac and Campaign Director Ray Rogers.

2. See our response to Coke's misinformation in the feature at: <http://www.killercoke.org/nb0831.htm>. In this response, are links to excellent reports: one by Prof. Lesley Gill of American University and one by Andy Higginbottom of the Colombia Solidarity Committee in the UK. (We've included the response in this package.)

3. See article on the Campaign in *Business Week*, Jan. 23, 2006:
http://www.businessweek.com/@@gzAEIIQQI@ScIB0A/magazine/content/06_04/b3968074.htm

4. Review the complaint filed by the ILRF and the USW at: www.laborrights.org (go to Current Projects/Coke's Abuses in Colombia). You can reach the attorneys who filed the Alien Tort Claims lawsuit: ILRF Executive Director Terry Collingworth at (202) 347-4100; USW Co-counsel Dan Kovalik at (412) 562-2518.