

President Juan Manuel Santos
c/o Ambassador Mauricio Rodriguez
Colombian Embassy to the United Kingdom
3 Hans Crescent
London SW1X OLN

20th December 2011

Dear President Santos,

We are writing on behalf of the principal British education trade unions to express our concern about the situation of our colleagues in Colombia.

We are aware that they are facing a series of reforms to the education sector which they feel will negatively affect labour rights and access to education. We are dismayed that, despite claims of a commitment to improve human rights, during the last year, their peaceful union opposition to these reforms has been met with continued repression.

Colombian teacher trade unionists continue to be subjected to death threats and displacement from their homes and workplaces. Most alarming is the high number of assassinations, with at least 12 murders so far this year. A list with the details of each case is below:

No.	Name	Date	Place	Trade Union
1.	Manuel Esteban Tejada	11/ 1/2011	Planeta Rica, Cordoba	Ademacor
2.	Silverio Antonio Sanchez	24/1/2011	Pereira, Risaralda	Ser
3.	Humberto de Jesus Espinoza Diaz	30/1/2011	Caldas, Risaralda	Ser
4.	Carlos Alberto Ayala	5/2/2011	Puerto Asis, Putumayo	Asep
5.	Jhonny Alfredo Sierra Vergara	15/05/2011	La Apartada, Cordoba	Ademacor
6.	Freddy Cuadrado Nuñez	27/05/2011	Cienga, Magdalena	Edumag
7.	Jorge Eliecer Rios Cardenas	08/06/2011	Dosquebradas, Risaralda	Ser
8.	Alejandro José Peñate Lopez	20/06/2011	Cotorra, Cordoba	Ademacor
9.	María Eugenia Arango Zapata	10/08/2011	Bagre, Antioquia	Adida
10.	Nallyd Tapia Jimenez	01/09/2011	Arboletes, Antioquia	Adida
11.	Jose Alberto Martinez Berrio	03/09/2011	Astrea, Cesar	Aducesar
12.	Luis Arbey Quiroz Vivas	07/10/2011	San Lorenzo, Narino	Simana

Additionally, several recent detentions demonstrate the ongoing judicial persecution of those who defend education. On October 2nd Omar Alfonso Combata, director of the Santa Ramos Education Centre and member of the Caquetá Workers' Trade Union, and three members of the FEU Colombian Federation of University Students; Fabián Camilo Escudero; Omar Marín and Jorge Eliecer Gaitán were detained. All continue to be held in La Modelo prison, Bogota, accused of "rebellion".

We also continue to be extremely concerned about the case of Dr. Miguel Angel Beltran, university professor and member of ASPU, the Colombian trade union of academics. He was imprisoned on 23rd May 2009 and held until 7th June 2011 after he was absolved of the accusations against him. However, the Procuraduria (Inspector General's Office) has now opened a disciplinary process against him. This "new" case is based on evidence already disproved in the previous trial and

appears to be aimed at preventing Dr. Beltran from working and teaching as an academic; it is yet another attempt to silence him. We also understand that despite being absolved of the charges against him, government ministers have continued to publically link Dr. Beltran with terrorism, statements which appear to have encouraged continued persecution. Indeed, since his release Dr. Beltran has faced threats, the interception of his communications and has recently received information on plans for his assassination, which state it will be carried out either by forced disappearance or a faked accident. We campaigned vigorously for Dr. Beltran's release from prison and continue to follow his case closely with great concern for his safety and academic freedom. We therefore urge you to provide guarantees for his life and put an end to the spurious charges against him.

We also have grave concerns about the treatment of recent student protests, several of which have been met with violent repression by state security forces. For example, on September 22nd 2011 at the La Macarena Campus of the University "Distrital Francisco Jose de Caldas, the ESMAD Colombian riot police used stun grenades against students, leaving eight minors injured as a result. On the same occasion, eleven students were detained in addition to psychological intimidation and a reported rape attempt. At the University of Pamplona, on September 20th the ESMAD used physical force causing tens of students to be injured and leading to the militarization of the university. On 4th October again in the University of Pamplona, the ESMAD used tear gas, stun grenades and rubber bullets indiscriminately against protestors, injuring students and other members of the public. This violent repression was extended to protestors and residents in three areas of Pamplona city and a curfew was enforced by the Pamplona Mayor's Office. On 12th October in the city of Cali, a student protest was attacked with explosives, killing Jan Farid Cheng Lugo, medical student of the University of Santiago de Cali. On 10th November at the University of Cauca, the ESMAD riot police again fired tear gas, pipe bombs and stun grenades at a student protest. Several demonstrators were arbitrarily detained and beaten, leading one student, Yonier Fernanco Galindez, to be hospitalised. Luis Fernando Enriquez Pantoja, one of the organisers, was also detained by police the day prior to the march. This level of repression is not the mark of a democratic society.

The abuses belie claims that the Colombian regime is committed to improving the human rights of trade union members. Rather they demonstrate the ongoing persecution of civil society opposition by Colombian state forces. We urge you to put an end to this practice: The necessary guarantees for life must be provided, those responsible for the above assassinations must be brought to justice and those detained must be released immediately.

Colombia cannot be respected as a democratic member of the international community until concrete improvements are made and innocent people stop being persecuted for their political beliefs and activities.

We look forward to progress in this matter.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christine Blower". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Christine Blower, General Secretary, National Union of Teachers (NUT)

Mary W. Boustead.

Mary Boustead, General Secretary, Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL)

Sally Hunt

Sally Hunt, General Secretary, University College Union (UCU)

Chris Keates

Chris Keates, General Secretary, NASUWT teachers' trade union

Liam Burns

Liam Burns, President, National Union of Students (NUS)

cc: Rt Hon William Hague MP, First Secretary of State, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, UK
Mr. Jose Manuel Barroso, President, European Commission
Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary General, United Nations
Mr. Juan Somavia, Director General, International Labour Organisation
Maria Wilhelmina Josepha Antonia (M.W.J.A) Van Gool, Ambassador, European Commission Delegation in Colombia
HMA John Dew, British Ambassador in Colombia
Amnesty International
Justice for Colombia
CUT, Colombian trade union confederation
ACEU, Colombian Association of University Students
ASPU, Colombian trade union of university teachers
FECODE, Colombian trade union of teachers
FEU, Colombian Federation of University Students