



President Juan Manuel Santos
c/o Ambassador Mauricio Rodriguez
Colombian Embassy to the United Kingdom
3 Hans Crescent
London SW1X 0LN

24th January, 2012

Dear President Santos,

We are writing to express our deep anger and sadness at the news of two more trade union activists who have been brutally murdered in recent days – one of them time directly at the hands of the Colombian Army.

- On Monday January 9th trade unionist Victor Manuel Hilarion Palacios, a herdsman and muletrain driver from Sumapaz, was travelling for work from San Juan de Sumapaz towards Rio Nevado when he was killed by Colombian army troops. The soldiers later handed his body to the CTI office in the town of Villavicencio, stating that he had been killed in crossfire – yet his colleagues and relatives who went to collect his body discovered it bore signs of having been brutally beaten and tortured.

Mr Hilarion was a member of SINTRAPAZ, part of FENSUAGRO, the Colombian Agricultural Workers Union. In February 2010 Mr Hilarion's name and photograph were found on a list of 18 social activists accused of being "FARC militia" in the area. All those listed were members of social and community organisations. As you are well aware, this type of accusation is common place against trade union activists and often leads to assassination.

Mr Hilarion was a carer for his elderly mother and leaves behind a young daughter.

Workers Uniting – the organisation representing over 3 million workers in UNITE the Union in the UK and the United Steelworkers of America in the US and Canada recently signed a partnership agreement with FENSUAGRO. We have a long history of working closely with this union which has suffered so much persecution at the hands of state security forces.

We know the union's leadership is still being denied security protection despite numerous requests which we have repeatedly supported. It continues to have members imprisoned – around 75 currently – and members assassinated, such as this most recent tragic example.

We consider an attack on a FENSUAGRO member as if it were one of our own members. In the US, Canada or UK, if a trade unionist were murdered by the army it would cause an uproar – it is simply unacceptable that in Colombia this happens on a regular basis with no repercussions for the perpetrators.

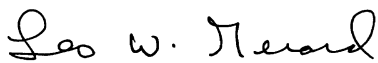
- Mauricio Redondo, a leader in the USO oil workers' union was killed on January 17th along with his wife, leaving behind 5 children. The USO has been the focus of government repression and paramilitary death threats ever since the mobilisations of last summer.

We call on you to immediately order an investigation into these brutal crimes, and ensure those responsible are brought to justice. We also request that all trade union members be freed from prison, and that the FENSUAGRO and USO leaderships receive adequate protection.

We have welcomed the change in official discourse towards trade unions, but sadly we see the situation remains the same on the ground for our colleagues. Over 25 trade union colleagues were murdered last year, and we will continue to raise these issues until we see an end to the abuses.

Our colleagues have suffered too much simply for defending their members' rights.

Yours sincerely,



LEO W. GERARD
International President – USW



LEN McCLUSKEY
General Secretary – Unite

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
HMA John Dew, British Ambassador in Colombia
P. Michael McKinley, US Ambassador to Colombia
Amnesty International
Justice for Colombia
CUT, Colombian trade union confederation
FENSUAGRO