



INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION
EUROPEAN TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION



To the Members of the European Parliament

To Karel De Gucht, European Commissioner
for Trade

Brussels, 1 March 2011

Lobbying by Colombian Government for a Colombia-EU Free trade agreement

To Members of the European Parliament,

Last year, we wrote to you regarding an intensive lobbying campaign at the European Parliament by the Colombian Government in an attempt to mislead the international community, and the European Parliament in particular, on the advances made by the Administration regarding the situation of human rights in their country so as to promote an early conclusion of the negotiations of a Free Trade Agreement (FTA).

They have now written to you again (through the Embassy of Colombia in Brussels) in an attempt to further convince you about advances made by the Government in the field of human rights and their efforts in the fight against impunity. To that end they quote from a Report of a recent ILO Mission to Colombia.

In the letter, they quote “some of the main conclusions”. Although we appreciate that you have seen the Report, we would draw your attention to a few conclusions which highlight the on-going severity of the situation for the exercise of fundamental rights in Colombia today:

“While opinion is divided on the extent to which trade union leaders and trade union members continued to be targeted because of their trade union activities, all are agreed that the only acceptable situation is one in which all acts of violence have ceased and that there is a need to act with determination to bring this about.”

“The importance of continued protection by the Government for trade union leaders and trade union members was highlighted.”

“[Nevertheless,] the Mission was conscious that the great majority of homicide cases remained unresolved, with negative consequences that were made abundantly clear to it by testimonies given by some relatives of the victims.”

“In this regard, the Mission is strongly of the view that the lack of trust between Colombia’s tripartite constituents is the most important obstacle to progress towards full respect of the rights guaranteed by ILO Conventions Nos.87 and 98 and towards a better future for all Colombian society.”

“The Mission, [while taking into account the above,] underlines that the majority of the cases have not yet been investigated nor have the perpetrators, including the intellectual authors of these crimes, been brought to justice.”

“The Mission is deeply concerned at the repeated and detailed information it received concerning acts of anti-union discrimination at the enterprise level and in the public sector as well as the failure to take effective action to stop it.”

“In that light, the Mission notes with regret that the level of trade union density in Colombia, variously estimated at between 4 and 7 per cent, remained very low and collective bargaining lower still.”

“...Information was also provided on frequent cases of anti-union dismissals as a consequence of the exercise of the right to create or join a union.”

“To date, limited legislative measures have been taken to address outstanding issues concerning compliance with freedom of association and collective bargaining Conventions.”

“Insistence on improvements recorded went with clear recognition of the very considerable challenges remaining, and the urgent need to overcome the many obstacles which remained to the effective implementation of the Tripartite Agreement of 2006 and Conventions Nos. 87 and 98.”

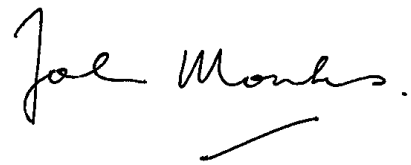
The ETUC and the ITUC, on behalf of its affiliates, the CUT, CGT and CTC who legitimately represent the real aspirations of working people in Colombia, therefore once again request Parliament to support the interruption of negotiations at this time and until real and significant progress has been achieved.

Failing to act with caution and establish respect for the fundamental internationally-recognised rights of working people will mean that trade unionists in Colombia will continue to die and those responsible for the violence will continue to enjoy impunity.

Yours sincerely,



Sharan Burrow
General Secretary
ITUC



John Monks
General Secretary
ETUC