



Global Justice

Summer 2008

Leaders tour Columbia: Free trade will hurt, not help

FREE TRADE with Colombia will lead to worse human and labour rights abuses and further devastation of communities at risk, Canada's public sector leaders said at a news conference in Bogota on July 24 at the end of their week-long tour of Colombia.

The statement was made to several Colombian media reporters following a meeting with leaders of the United Central of Workers. It said in part:

"We have met with many sectors of Colombian society, including government officials, the United Central of Workers (CUT) and other trade unions, opposition leaders, non-governmental organizations, groups representing indigenous and Afro-Colombian peoples as well as the Canadian ambassador..."

"Our overwhelming conclusion is that a free trade agreement will not help the Colombian people. It will only exacerbate an already horrifying list of human and labour rights abuses that are shocking the world..."

"On our return to Canada, we will tell our one million members, our government and all Canadians that it is unacceptable to sign a free trade agreement with Colombia as long as trade unionists are at risk and free collective bargaining and other labour and human rights continue to be violated."

The full text of the statement was issued as a news release sent in Spanish to Colombian media and in English and French to Canadian media. Read it and full coverage of the leaders' tour at <http://www.cupe.ca/globaljustice>.



Leaders met with many groups, including members of the indigenous community at La Maria Pendiama near Cali.



National President Paul Moist with displaced person at La Onda in Medellin.

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Send suggestions to research@cupe.ca.

CUPE

Colombian unionist visits Canada as CUPE guest

A YOUNG COLOMBIAN public sector worker, who has been under threat from death squads, began her visit to Canada on July 14 as CUPE's guest until August when she will return to Cali, Colombia, and her job as a municipal waste worker.

CUPE members and staff welcomed Maria Fernanda Bolanos, a 34-year-old single mother, during her travels to Ontario, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and British Columbia.

Her union, SINTRAEMSIRVA, represents about 450 waste management workers in Cali. Its fight against the privatization of municipal services has meant severe repression against union members. Long-time union activist Carlos Alberto Chicaiza was killed in 2004.

Others, including Bolanos, regularly receive death threats.

Despite the repression, the union has continued to fight privatization and to protect jobs and benefits for its members by developing alternative proposals for keeping the company, EMSIRVA, solvent and public.

"We always have to confront difficulties in order to realize our ideas and commitments," Bolanos said. "If we fall, we need to pick ourselves up with increased will and our heads held up high." Bolanos, who operates the weigh scale in a solid waste disposal unit, toured several waste water and treatment plants run by CUPE members.

While in Halifax, she joined a rally in support of CUPE flight attendants

protesting the planned closure of several Air Canada bases.

In Moncton, she met federal New Democratic Party leader Jack Layton, union leaders, global justice and human rights committee members and Colombian families now living in Canada.

In Ottawa, she met youth and women's committee members at CUPE and other unions. She also met with John Gordon, national president of the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC), members of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) and the National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE).

In Toronto, she met with CUPE 416 and other CUPE locals, and made a side trip to Niagara Falls. She also visited Vancouver and Victoria.

CUPE, PSAC and NUPGE are affiliated to the 20-million-member Public Services International (PSI), the global union federation that requested the tour.



Bolanos joins rally to save Halifax Air Canada base and CUPE jobs.

Letter helps Colombian university worker

WRITING LETTERS of solidarity can have a direct impact on the lives of workers in other parts of the world. In May, CUPE leaders wrote to Colombia president Álvaro Uribe to protest attacks on students and union leaders at the University of Valle in Cali.

The attacks occurred on April 3 during a student demonstration against government funding cuts and the privatization of education. Police anti-riot squads and the army shot at and assaulted the demonstrators and smashed windows and buildings. Seven students were arrested and many more were injured.

Jose Milciades Sanchez Ortiz, a human rights defender for the university workers' union SINTRAUNICOL, was filming the police violence. The police anti-riot squad assaulted him, shot him in the arm with a tear gas canister, threatened him with arrest and destroyed the evidence he had been filming. Sanchez Ortiz was also followed and threatened by the police.

When he went to the police station, as ordered, they told him the charges had been dropped. On leaving, he noticed the CUPE letter on the police department front desk.



University union leader Carlos Gonzalez, shown with young worker, hosted the leaders' meeting with his members.

Stop killings, end free trade talks with Colombia



Leaders told Colombian minister of interior that they would not support free trade deal.

CANADA'S four major public sector unions, representing more than a million workers, have condemned the continued killing of trade union activists in Colombia and called on Prime Minister Stephen Harper to halt free trade negotiations.

"We are appalled to learn that trade union lives are being treated as tradable commodities in Canada's ongoing negotiations with the Colombian government," said the national leaders of CUPW, CUPE, NUPGE and PSAC.

The union leaders took the unusual step of sending a joint letter to Prime Minister Stephen Harper on learning that a free trade agreement would allow the Colombian government to pay a token fine into a 'cooperation fund' when a Colombian trade unionist is murdered.

Manitoba GJ group visits union in Peru

IN APRIL, a group from Winnipeg, including several members of the CUPE Manitoba global justice committee, visited Peru on vacation. While there, they met with FENTAP, a union similar to CUPE and an affiliate of PSI.

Sue Roth, one of the committee members, published her report in CUPE 1063's *News For Your Dues* newsletter. Here is an excerpt:

"Only 5 per cent of workers are unionized but the work of FENTAP has great impact...FENTAP really lives solidarity. They have launched a cross-country campaign to let the public know privatization of water means increased costs and puts clean water out of reach for the poor..."

"Whether we are in the South or in the North, we face many of the same struggles. Solidarity is not about charity. It is about working together so we can all have our basic needs met, be valued, have a choice and have a voice," Roth wrote.

PSI Andean Region staff member Juan Diego Gomez helped set up the FENTAP meeting from his office in Bogota, Colombia. CUPE is one of nine Canadian unions affiliated to PSI.



Visiting CUPE group in Lima.

'I can't believe these things still happen'

CUPE'S global justice website receives feedback on several issues of international concern. Here are two letters on the situation in Colombia:

"I just wanted to say thanks and good luck to Paul Moist for heading out to Colombia with the CUPE delegation. I can't believe in 2008 these things are still happening in our world. And to think our own PM would entertain the idea of signing such an agreement with these people is truly distressing. I wish you all the best!" – Nancy Forhan, Vancouver.

"I think it is outrageous that our prime minister is signing this [free trade] deal with the Columbian government." – Felicity Dunfield, CUPE 2950, Vancouver.

HEU member returns to his Chilean homeland

LUCIANO Sanchez is a Chilean-Canadian and a member of CUPE's Hospital Employees' Union in Vancouver. In May 2008, he returned to the land of Nobel prize-winning poet Pablo Neruda, feminist Gabriela Mistral (also a Nobel Prize winning poet), and others to celebrate May Day with Chile's Central Unitarian Worker's Union. Read his report at <http://cupe.ca/globaljustice/HEU-member-returns-t>.

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Celebrating May Day in Santiago. Not long after, the crowd faced tear gas.