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Profile of a maquila worker in Honduras



PHOTO: JULIÁN ARANGO OSORIO

MARGARITA, A MAQUILA WORKER IN CHOLOMA, HONDURAS, WORKS FOR THE CANADIAN-OWNED GILDAN FACTORY

Margarita is a 49 year-old Honduran maquila worker. She works in the Canadian-owned Gildan factory. She is the proud mother of 5 children and 3 grandchildren, and lives near the city of Choloma. Born in San Pedro Sula, she has lived her entire life in this region of Honduras. Margarita has worked in the maquila sector for 15 years and it has taken a negative toll on her health.

Back in 2005, her health problems began when she started experiencing pain in her back, shoulder and neck. This injury is directly linked to the repetitive movements and long hours that she has had to endure at the factory sewing collars onto t-shirts. In a factory like the one where Margarita is currently working, workers are expected to sew sections of the t-shirt onto at least 500 dozen

t-shirts a day. That means that Margarita, in a 12-hour shift, was expected to sew 6,000 collars each day.

After many doctor's appointments, Margarita finally received a health certificate stating the need for her

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The DeltaNOW!

In 2013, Common Frontiers sent a delegation as human rights and official elections observers to Honduras for their presidential elections. The delegation was composed of representatives from various labour organizations, NGO's, community groups, and academics including CUPE member Peter Dawson. Brother Dawson is a contract instructor at York University and a CUPE 3903 member. The observer mission travelled to various parts of Honduras to meet with communities and groups affected by Canadian investment in mining, maquiladora zones and the mega tourism sector. Upon his return Peter educated and mobilized his students around the issues facing the Honduran people and solicited actions in solidarity. Several students took up this call and illustrated the potential impact worker to worker solidarity can have on exposing human and trade union rights violations. The following is an article written by Christina Noudga, one of Peter's students who created an organization to support the struggle of the Garifuna people in Honduras.



PHOTO: NPATTERSON VIA FLICKR (CC BY-NC-ND)

The DeltaNOW is a human rights organization currently focused on preserving the Rights of Indigenous Nations.

The group was established in 2014, as part of a social integrity collaboration project at York University. The group was comprised of individuals from various educational fields who have united over one goal: the preservation of human rights. Our first project was in solidarity with The Black Fraternal Organization of Honduras (OFRANEH) and Common Frontiers. Here we set out to create a campaign that would create action towards the preservation of the Garifuna culture. Honduras has long been infamous as the “murder capital of the world”. The state continues to threaten the existence of

23 indigenous Garifuna communities residing on its shores. This indigenous nation struggles with government corruption, displacement, and cultural genocide. By early 2015, the DeltaNOW had organized a campaign on the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) addressing this controversial topic and exposing the role of Canadian investment in these crimes against indigenous human rights. DeltaNOW has gained popularity within Honduras prompting social awareness and we continue to focus our efforts on the unjust treatment of the Garifuna within Honduras. ●

Global Justice is published three times a year to provide workers and their representatives an overview of international solidarity work taken on by the Global Justice fund and within CUPE as a whole.

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CUPE Canadian Union of Public Employees



Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement hasn't improved human rights in Colombia

“It’s easier to form an armed group than a union in Colombia,” a postal worker told Canadian public sector unionists in July.

After a long organizing drive, his union only has 28 union members with a private courier company. His story was repeated by other unionists who faced mass firings and physical threats for organizing workers in multinational courier companies that benefited from the privatization of the country’s postal service ten years earlier.

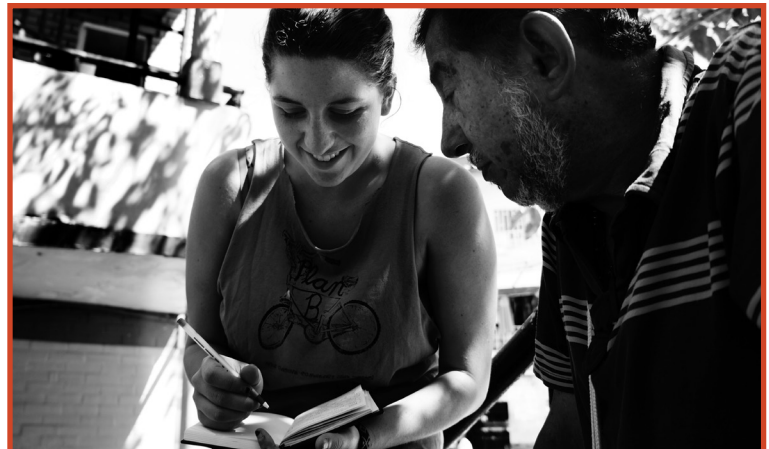
Colombia is known as a dangerous place to be a trade unionist. Since 1987, 2,942 trade unionists were murdered in the country. This has driven the unionization rate down from 17 per cent to 4.9 per cent. Intimidation, disregard for union rights,

privatization and an increase in precarious work contracts add to the difficulties for union survival in Colombia.

Despite the dangers, Colombian unionists continue to courageously fight for labour rights and against the privatization of public services.

“Your visits help save lives,” Yessica Hoyos from the Collective of Colombian Labour Lawyers (CCAJAR) told us.

Hoyos was one of many Colombians who spoke to a Canadian Parliamentary Committee about human rights violations in her country when Canada was negotiating a free trade agreement with Colombia. The Canadian government signed the agreement in 2011 but with a promise to conduct an annual review of human rights in Colombia. ●



MONICA GUTIERREZ A MEMBER OF CUPE 79 WAS IN COLOMBIA LAST YEAR FILMING *CRUDE GOLD*, A SERIES OF SHORT DOCUMENTARIES SHOWCASING FOUR PIVOTAL CASES OF FOREIGN-FUNDED MINING EXPLOITATION CONNECTED TO CANADIAN INVESTORS.

Crude Gold casts eye on Canadian foreign investment

Crude Gold is a series of short documentaries showcasing five pivotal cases of foreign-funded mining exploitation connected to Canadian investors. Every year in Colombia union leaders, activists and members are assassinated. Similarly, human rights defenders are targeted, threatened and murdered in a fog of impunity and unanswered questions. The overwhelming majority of crimes and human rights violations related to the armed conflict are concentrated in regions with a major presence of mining investment. According to the Office of the Auditor General of Colombia, these regions are the scene of 78 per cent of crimes against trade unionists and 89 per cent of violations of Native peoples’ rights.

Profile of a maquila worker in Honduras

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employer to relocate her to another position in the factory. She now works in an area that sorts the t-shirts for labelling. She is one of the few that received this relocation. Numerous others have to endure the pain for many years, as she did; often

these illness are not recognized as work related injuries by the medical system or if they are and a certificate for work relocation is issued, the employer does not follow through or relocate the worker.

When asked about the most difficult part of living with her injuries on a daily basis, Margarita commented that it is difficult that she can’t

hold her grandchildren or help out with household chores. She wants to, but her physical condition makes it too difficult.

Margarita is a volunteer community leader with the Honduran Women’s Collective (CODEMUH). She started attending CODEMUH activities in 2006. She has since become a coordinator of a women’s group in her com-

munity facilitating workshops on various topics that she has learned about through CODEMUH including human and labour rights, and reproductive and sexual health.

CUPE Global Justice has partnered with CODEMUH, which is working to make positive changes in this industry and ensure that the health system recognizes these injuries as work related injuries. ●



1. Post 2015 global “development” agenda challenged The global trade union movement has been deeply engaged in the United Nations Post 2015 Financing for Development and Sustainable Development Goal negotiations, advocating a people’s agenda that includes redistributing wealth, limiting the power of transnational corporations, stopping the privatization of public services, mitigating the proliferation of trade and investment agreements, and regulating financial institutions.

The experience of millions of people living in poverty in developing countries has led to a distrust of the intentions of Global Financial Institutions and multinational corporations. As the negotiations continue, and transition toward implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, we will continue to expose futile effort to achieve environmental sustainability and poverty eradication, through Public Private Partnerships and “blended finance” models that leave neo-liberal globalization unchallenged.

2. General Strike in India On September 2nd, trade unions in India held a general strike to protest against the anti-worker economic policies of their new government. Unions are concerned about the government’s anti-worker, anti-people and pro-corporate actions and are demanding an end to precarious employment, a new minimum wage, universal social security cover for all workers, an end to privatisation of the public sector, the withdrawal of the new pension scheme and compulsory registration of trade unions within a period of 45 days.

3. Struggling to survive A rapidly growing crisis is emerging in Europe as the numbers of people fleeing violence and unrest in Syria, Libya, Somalia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, sub-Saharan Africa and other regions grows. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, approximately 2,500 people are believed to have died or gone missing trying to reach Europe so far this year. Shamefully, some countries in Europe are more concerned with finding ways to prevent these refugees from crossing their borders, including through military and police aggression than with making genuine efforts to address the conditions that are forcing them to flee in the first place.

4. Uganda CUPE National will participate in a delegation led by the Stephen Lewis Foundation (SLF) in October 2015 to attend the National Grandmothers Convening in Uganda. Community-based partners of the SLF will bring together nearly 1,000 Ugandan grandmothers (and a handful from Kenya and South Africa) for a three-day conference to give each other encouragement in the face of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and lay the groundwork for a strong network to support their work to turn the tide of AIDS not only at a community-level, but on a national scale.