

March 26, 2008

President of the Republic of Colombia
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Dear Mr. President:

We have learned of the brutal murder of four trade unionists around March 6, the day of the mass rallies to protest the vicious acts of paramilitary groups in Colombia, and we join with a chorus of others in denouncing your government's failure to protect trade unionists forced to live in fear of paramilitary groups who threaten their lives.

We are informed that the victims of this recent paramilitary violence were Leonidas Gomez Roza, leader of the National Union of Bank Employees (UNEB); Carlos Burbano, vice-president of the hospital workers' union (Asociación Nacional de Trabajadores Hospitalarios); Carmen Cecilia Carvajal, a teacher; and, Gildardo Gómez Alzate, a teacher and activist with the Asociación de Institutores de Antioquia. The four were active participants in the rallies that attracted hundreds of thousands of people.

Colombia has earned a reputation as the world's most murderous country. With this latest murder, your government must wear a badge of shame. We have written to our prime minister to say that Canada will share that shame if it proceeds to negotiate a free trade agreement with a country that holds one of the world's worst human rights records.

The Colombian trade union movement, especially the CUT and its affiliated unions, continues to be the victim of a leadership extermination campaign and your government appears to condone such action. We understand that the Black Eagles paramilitary group has declared the UNEB a 'Military Objective'.

On behalf of our 570,000 members, we implore you to bring to justice the paramilitaries that maraud and murder with impunity. Submit to a thorough international investigation into these and other murders that have taken place at the hands of the paramilitary groups. Colombia, alone, cannot conduct it. To have any legitimacy, it must involve the international community.

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CUPE implores you to call an end to the intolerably dangerous situation facing trade unionists and other civil society activists in Colombia. Until the safety of all civil society activists is insured, Canadians will oppose a future trading relationship with your country.

Yours truly,



PAUL MOIST
National President



CLAUDE GÉNÉREUX
National Secretary-Treasurer

cc. CUPE NEB
CLC President Ken Georgetti