



April 20, 2009

Dear Member of Parliament
House of Commons,
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

We are writing on behalf of more than one million members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, the National Union of Public and General Employees and the Public Service Alliance of Canada to express our very deep concern about and opposition to the Canada- Colombia Free Trade Agreement that was tabled on March 26.

The same day when the Minister of International Trade Stockwell Day tabled the new Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement in the House of Commons, tactical squads of the Colombia police accompanied by armed tanks, water cannons, and tear gas surrounded the City of Cali's sanitation and street cleaning company as the government moved to liquidate the assets of the municipal company, as part of its move to privatize all municipal services. A number of workers and a city councillor were injured as a result. This is business as usual in Colombia.

From July 18-25, we visited Colombia on behalf of our membership. What we saw and learned, confirmed that we are right to oppose this deal and to speak out against it on behalf of Colombian workers and their families. During this visit, we had the privilege of meeting with the Cali sanitation workers, many of whom had received death threats due to their opposition to the privatization efforts of the Uribe government.

We also visited the Colombian postal workers who suffered the same fate in 2006, when tactical squads and tanks were moved into position around all post offices in the country to effect the liquidation of Adpostal, the Colombian Postal Corporation. Workers, most of them women were dragged out into the soccer fields to be searched at gun point. Most unions in Colombia have suffered the loss of members and leaders through outright murder or exile. 2,690 trade unionists have been murdered since 1986; 49 trade unionists were assassinated in 2008, and another 9 murdered in the first 3 months of 2009.

In 2008, Colombia experienced the largest displacement of people outside of the Sudan, making this a humanitarian crisis of the first order. We visited with Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities who faced violent eviction from their land by para-military and military incursions to make way for agribusiness, mining corporations and others multinational corporations. These communities expressed their complete rejection of the Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement precisely because it endangers the survival of their ancestral cultures; already threatened by the encroachment of paramilitary and transnational corporations eager to stake claims over the potential oil, gas and mineral reserves and biodiversity on aboriginal lands.

Given the absence of democratic processes in Colombia and the scandalous levels of impunity that protect government and paramilitary forces, a Free Trade Agreement would only aggravate and irreparably compromise the rights of aboriginal and Afro-Colombian peoples.

Indeed, we were very disturbed by what we saw in Colombia. We attach our report for your information. But we are equally disturbed by the Canadian government's decision to ignore the concerns of Amnesty International, the United Nations High Commission on Human Rights, Human Rights Watch, the International Trade Union Confederation, the International Labour Office, the Inter-American Human Rights Commission, the International Commission of Jurists among other prestigious bodies who have raised concerns about the collusion of government forces in serious human rights abuses and murder in Colombia.

Attempts to disclose the connection between the human rights violators and the Uribe government have led to further threats and smear campaigns against journalists, human right defenders, and even magistrates and members of the Supreme Court of Colombia. In its 2008 report, the International Commission of Jurists outlined the grave and repeated attacks by the executive branch of government, and President Uribe in particular to try and discredit the Supreme Court of Colombia, placing a number of prestigious judges in danger of being murdered. In Colombia, impunity has no bounds.

We ask you to vote with your conscience and to say no to the Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement.

Sincerely Yours,



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JAMES CLANCY
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