



October 23, 2008

Dr. Álvaro Uribe Vélez,
President of Colombia
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Dear President Uribe,

Given the critical and urgent situation facing the Indigenous Peoples of Colombia, we appeal to you directly, in the name of our four National Public Sector Unions of Canada, and our one million members, to put an end to the violence against the indigenous and social movements of Colombia.

We are shaken by news of the assault launched by the Public Security Forces against the Indigenous Peoples of Colombia, especially those living in the departments of Cauca, Valle de Cauca, and Northern Cauca.

Over one hundred persons have been severely injured, and at least two persons killed following the attack by Public Security Forces in La Maria Piendamó. Further, we are profoundly concerned about the reports of armed civilians protected by police shooting at the protesters and at the barbarous acts committed by members of ESMAD (anti-riot police), including gravely wounding one person with a machete, impeding the arrival of ambulances and the destruction of the local community's first aid equipment. Moreover, there have been reports of further violence and assassinations that have taken place against indigenous peoples across Colombia.

In the last month alone, 31 indigenous peoples have been murdered in Colombia. The use of false evidence to accuse indigenous people of being members of the FARC and campaigns to discredit all civil society organizations is shameful and serves to galvanize public concern for indigenous and social organizations internationally.


During our recent visit to Colombia, Mr. President, we met with various government authorities, such as the Minister of the Interior and Justice, the Vice ministers of the Interior and Labour Relations; the Director of the Human Rights program for the Vice-Presidency, and the Director of Human Rights for the Ministry of the Interior. All of them assured us that there had been substantial improvements in the situation of human and labour rights in the country, and that your Government was establishing measures to avoid any constraints on the exercise of those rights and to bring sanctions to bear on those who violate those rights.

However, since the visit, Mr. President, we have observed an acute deterioration of the political climate and an intensification of repression against the social and labour movement: the indiscriminate attacks against the indigenous peoples, the striking sugar workers, the afro-Colombian people, the threats against the striking workers of the judicial branch, led by their union, Asonal Judicial, and finally the increased numbers of trade unionists that have been murdered since January 2008. All this provides clear evidence that the Government of Colombia is ignoring the most basic elemental human and labour rights of its citizens.

Indigenous peoples are making legitimate claims on their ancestral and historic rights - rights that are recognized by the universal system of human rights and Convention 169 of the International Labour Organization. They are protesting the proposed trade agreements with Canada, the United States and the European Union knowing full well that these agreements will have a serious and negative impact on traditional livelihoods. We join with them and others throughout the world and demand an end to the violence and massacres perpetrated against the indigenous communities across Colombia and particularly against the communities that have gathered in La Maria Piendamó.

We urge you to intervene immediately, withdraw the security forces and in good faith address the legitimate concerns of the indigenous peoples of Cauca.

Yours truly,



DENIS LEMELIN
Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW)



PAUL MOIST
Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE)



JAMES CLANCY
National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE)



JOHN GORDON
Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC)

c.c.

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper, Prime Minister of Canada
The Honourable Stéphane Dion, Liberal Party of Canada
The Honourable Gilles Duceppe, Bloc Québécois
The Honourable Jack Layton, New Democratic Party of Canada
Ms. Elisabeth May, Green Party of Canada
CIIT clerk and members
Canadian Ambassador to Colombia, Geneviève des Rivières
Colombian Ambassador to Canada, Jaime Giron
Canadian Labour Congress
CUT Colombia
Colectivo de Abogados Alvear Restrepo
Amnesty International Canada
Trade Union Confederation of the Americas
Public Service International
Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia
CUPE National Aboriginal Council
PSAC National Aboriginal, Inuit, Métis (NAIM) Circle
Assembly of First Nations of Canada
Guillermo Gonzalez Gobernador de Cauca
Juan Carlos Abadia, Gobernador del Valle del Cauca
Francisco Santos, Vicepresidente de la República
Juan Manuel Santos, Ministro de la Defensa
Fabio Valencia Cossio, Ministro del Interior y de Justicia
Mario Iguaran, Fiscal General de la Nación
Volmar Antonio Perez Ortiz, Defensor del Pueblo
Edgardo Jose Maya Villazon, Procurador General de la Nación
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