



Global Justice

Case study #3

Our Global Justice Fund at work

Project:

Solidarity tours and defending human rights with trade unionists, Colombia

Supported jointly by:

CUPE National Global Justice Fund, CUPE British Columbia, B.C. Government Employees' Union, CoDevelopment Canada (CoDev) and the Canadian International Development Agency.

Goals:

- Build solidarity among Canadian and Colombian trade unionists and other activists,
- Promote and defend human and labour rights, and
- Support and advance the fights against privatization of public services in Canada and Colombia.

Activities:

Two groups of Canadian trade unionists, including five CUPE members, travelled to Colombia in 2006 and a group of Colombian activists visited Canada the year before. Participants shared information about their struggles, successes and challenges, and discussed how we can better work in solidarity with one another.

This is just one project made possible with support from CUPE's National Global Justice Fund. To find out about others, and how to get involved in international solidarity work, visit www.cupe.ca/globaljustice.



In July 2006, three CUPE members (Ken Davidson, CUPE BC; Joanne Foote, HEU-CUPE BC; and Sharm Dursun, CUPE Saskatchewan) travelled to Colombia and participated in the graduation ceremony of the human rights diploma program in Neiva. On the November 2006 Frontlines Tour, CUPE was represented by: Trace Fall (CUPE PEI), Dennis Lewycky (National staff, CUPE Manitoba), and Barb Moore (CUPE Nova Scotia).

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CUPE members and staff march alongside Colombian partners to oppose privatization.

One of the groups we partner with in Colombia is NOMADESC, the Association for Research and Social Action in Colombia. NOMADESC educates trade unionists and community leaders to understand and defend their human rights. The model of training includes participatory research techniques to assist students with assessing community needs and developing action plans.

A network of graduates from NOMADESC's human rights diploma program – from labour, indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, student groups, and women's organizations – now educates others to defend human rights and build leadership in the southwest region of Colombia.

Background:

CUPE, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, the Public Service Alliance of Canada and CoDev have been working jointly in solidarity with Colombia public sector unions on the Frontlines Initiative to defend public services since 2004.

CUPE BC and CUPE National have been partners supporting the work of NOMADESC, the Association for Research and Social Action, for more than four years.

Outcomes:

The actions of one community that has participated in the diploma program illustrate the impact that the training and support can have.

In May 2006, the residents of several small communities marched 18 hours to the city of Cali to demand a meeting with a multinational company. They sought compensation for the communities' land that was lost 20 years earlier when a hydroelectric dam was built. Though they were attacked and intimidated, their march led to discussions with the company that are continuing today.

Issues:

Colombia is the most dangerous place to be a trade unionist. More than 2,500 unionists have been assassinated in the country since 1989. This savage attack on organized labour is meant to intimidate and silence opposition to government policies and economic restructuring that favour local elite and foreign multinationals.

Privatization of public services and ongoing and recent threats against human rights defenders, labour leaders and communities who speak out in defence of their rights, make strengthening the NOMADESC human rights network and building solidarity with our Colombian partners more important than ever.

Visit CUPE.ca/globaljustice for more information about current projects, how to propose projects, and how you and/or your local can show your support for international solidarity by contributing to the Global Justice Fund.

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