

March 28, 2008

Señor Presidente Álvaro Uribe Vélez
Presidente de la República
Palacio de Nariño,
Carrera 8 No. 7-2
Bogotá,
Colombia

Dear President Uribe:

I am writing to you to express concern about the human rights situation in your country. On behalf of the 120,000 members of our union, I ask you to take measures to ensure the safety of human rights defenders from trade unions and other organizations who have been targeted recently - especially in the weeks following widespread demonstrations organized by the National Movement of Victims of State Crimes (MOVICE) on March 6, 2008. It is our understanding that those demonstrations and other demonstrations around the world highlighted the human rights violations committed by Colombian security forces and army-backed paramilitary groups.

Since that time, several people who belong to organizations believed to be involved in those demonstrations have been threatened and in some cases killed. As a trade union, we are extremely disturbed by the heavy incidence of union members killed since early March. On March 4, Carmen Cecilia Carvajal (from ASINORT) was killed; on March 8 Leonidas Gómez (UNEB Banking Union) was found dead; on March 12 Carlos Burbano (ANTHOC health union) was found dead; and more recently, on March 22 Adolfo Gonzales Montes (SINTRACARBON coal miners union) was tortured and assassinated. Apparently a total of 12 trade unionists have been killed since the beginning of 2008.

We find this situation deplorable and urge your government to take all measures deemed appropriate by the individuals and organizations that were named in the death threats received by e-mail on March 11. We call for full and impartial investigations into the killings of social activists and the death threat issued on March 11 and that the results of these be made public and those responsible brought to justice.

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We also call for decisive action to be taken to confront and dismantle paramilitary groups and a full investigation into the links with security forces and a break with those links as called for in numerous United Nations recommendations.

Finally, we ask that you direct the appropriate authorities to produce policy and plans – together with human rights defenders - to guarantee their safety according to principles of the United Nation Declaration on the Rights and Responsibilities of Individuals, Groups and Institutions to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. We urge you to make these plans and policies public.

In Canada we value the right of individuals, trade unions and other social organizations to express their views publicly and demonstrate en masse against human rights violations. It is an affront to all of us when individuals and their organizations in other countries are prevented from exercising these freedoms. An Injury to One is an Injury to All is our slogan.

It is in this spirit that we implore you to take all effective measures to stop the threats and the killings of human rights defenders in your country.

Yours sincerely,

Warren Thomas,
President
Ontario Public Service Employees Union

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cc. His Excellency Jaime Giron Duarte, Ambassador for Colombia
Sr. Fernando Araújo Perdomo, Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores
Corporación Colectivo de Abogados 'José Alvear Restrepo'
CUT Colombia