



April 11, 2012

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave.
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

One year ago the U.S. and Colombian governments announced the signing of the U.S.-Colombia Labor Action Plan. Colombia expressed their commitment to “protect internationally recognized labor rights, prevent violence against labor leaders, and prosecute the perpetrators of such violence.” These commitments are not yet being fulfilled and key elements of the Labor Action Plan remain unfulfilled.

SEIU works closely with unions in Colombia. We have observed first hand the terror and violence directed at workers who have the audacity to exercise their internationally recognized rights. Trade unions and labor organizers operate in an environment where they are routinely threatened and attacked.

The facts are well known.

- Colombia is the most dangerous country in the world to be a trade unionist. Four trade unionists have already been murdered this year. Thirty trade unionists were murdered last year. There has not been a single prosecution for these murders. In the last 25 years far less than 10 percent of the nearly 3,000 murder cases have been successfully prosecuted.

- The Colombian government has not taken adequate steps to provide effective protection measures for trade unionists.

- Companies in Colombian are not recognizing unions or respecting Colombian laws.

- Colombian authorities are not prosecuting companies that refuse to comply with labor laws and violate human rights.

- Workers do not yet have direct contracts with companies. Efforts to end labor intermediation have been ineffective. While the Colombian government claims to have addressed abuses by the Associative Labor Cooperatives (CTAs) many sub-contractors are using the same model with a different name.

- Most Afro-Colombian workers, who make up an estimated 25% of Colombia's population and a disproportionate number of the country's over 5.2 million internally displaced, work in sectors where labor rights standards are weakest. Many Afro-Colombian workers describe their situation as “modern day slavery.”

MARY KAY HENRY
International President

ELISEO MEDINA
International Secretary-Treasurer

MITCH ACKERMAN
Executive Vice President

KIRK ADAMS
Executive Vice President

GERRY HUDSON
Executive Vice President

EILEEN KIRLIN
Executive Vice President

VALARIE LONG
Executive Vice President

TOM WOODRUFF
Executive Vice President

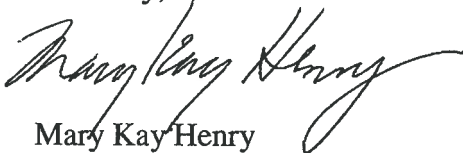
SERVICE EMPLOYEES
INTERNATIONAL UNION
CTW, CLC

1800 Massachusetts Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20036

202.730.7000
TDD: 202.730.7481
www.SEIU.org

Many workers, correctly in my view, see trade agreements as a race to the bottom. The lack of worker's rights, and the artificial suppression of wages, is an important inducement for capital flight and overseas production by companies. This depresses wages in the U.S. as well. This is a moment when the U.S. -- Colombia's largest trading partner -- can send a powerful message to Colombia's government. If you certify the Labor Action Plan while workers still lack rights, there is little chance that conditions will improve. I urge you to not implement the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement until the goals of the Labor Action Plan are met and labor rights are respected in Colombia.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Mary Kay Henry". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Mary Kay Henry
International President

MKH:ML:lw
opeiu#2
afl-cio, clc