

**A LETTER to the SECRETARY OF STATE From U.S. TRADE UNIONS
OPPOSING HUMAN RIGHTS CERTIFICATION OF U.S. AID to the
COLOMBIAN MILITARY**

March 7, 2006

The Honorable Secretary of State Dr. Condoleezza Rice
Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Madam Secretary:

We write to you today as U.S. trade unions concerned about violence against Colombian trade unionists and the pending human rights certification of U.S. aid to Colombia. We would like to respectfully urge you to refrain from certifying that the Colombian government meets the human rights conditions included in P.L.108-447 and P.L. 109-102, the Foreign Operations Appropriations Acts for FY2005 and FY2006, until the Colombian government demonstrates substantial progress on key cases of violence against Colombian trade unionists.

Colombia continues to be the most violent place in the world for trade unionists. We believe that U.S. aid to Colombia should be used to promote the political will to end impunity for those who attack trade unionists. While there are hundreds of recent cases which demand investigation and prosecution, we are particularly concerned about the two “benchmark cases” of violence against Colombian trade unionists and would like to propose that the following steps are taken before the State Department certifies the human rights conditions:

1. Investigate and prosecute intellectual authors of the three Colombian trade unionists murdered in Arauca. The assassination of three Colombian trade unionists by the Colombian military in the Arauca province of Colombia on August 5, 2004 is one of the most egregious cases of recent violence against Colombian trade unionists. Witnesses claim that these three union leaders were forced to strip down to their undergarments and enter the street, where they were then executed by members of the Colombian army’s 18th Brigade. While there have been several arrests of Colombian troops and a civilian who took part in the killings, their cases appear to be stalled and there is no apparent investigation into the intellectual authors of the crime. Failure to investigate and prosecute the intellectual authors of this crime, while only pursuing the direct perpetrators of the crime (the “few bad apples” approach), permits the violence instigated by senior military officials to continue with impunity.

We are aware that the State Department delayed certification of the human rights conditions in 2005, in part due to concerns surrounding the assassination of these three trade unionists in Arauca. As was true in 2005 when a portion of U.S. aid was temporarily withheld, there still appears to be no significant progress on an investigation of intellectual authors of these assassinations or any charges against those responsible.

2. Investigate and prosecute those responsible for Operación Dragon. In August 2004, a conspiracy plan, called Operación Dragon, was revealed that showed the planned assassination of members of trade union and human rights leaders. There has since been significant evidence that Operación Dragon was led by active and retired members of state security forces. However, no real progress has been made in prosecution of those responsible. Moreover, those who were targeted through Operación Dragon have continued to be targets of harassment and intimidation.

The Colombian government has consistently failed to investigate and charge those responsible for the murders of Colombian trade unionists. According to the Human Rights Observatory of the Office of the Vice President of Colombia, of the 1,981 murders of trade unionists from 1992 to 2004, only 0.01% of these murders ever resulted in jail time for those responsible. Of the over 60 assassinations of trade unionists in 2005, to our knowledge, there have not been any convictions of the assailants. As international unions concerned about the impact of U.S. policy on workers here and abroad, we believe that the U.S. should withhold military aid to Colombia while impunity reigns in Colombia.

At a minimum, we firmly believe that, because the Colombian government is required by U.S. law to prosecute key cases of alleged human rights abuses by members of the Colombian military in order to receive military aid through the foreign aid appropriations bill, the U.S. government should withhold aid to Colombian security forces until there is significant progress into investigation and prosecution 1) of the intellectual authors of those assassinated in Arauca, and 2) of the material and intellectual authors of Operación Dragon.

Thank you for your consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,

James Spinosa, President
International Longshore and Warehouse Union, ILWU

Milton Rosado, National President
The Labor Council for Latin American Advancement, LCLAA

Andrew L. Stern, President
The Service Employees International Union, CLC, SEIU

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