

**A LETTER to CONGRESS From U.S. TRADE UNIONS
OPPOSING MORE U.S. AID to the COLOMBIAN MILITARY and the
ANDEAN FREE TRADE AGREEMENT**

June 5, 2006

Dear Member of Congress:

In light of the approaching congressional consideration of the FY 2007 foreign aid appropriations bill and the recently negotiated Andean Free Trade Agreement (AFTA) with Colombia, we write to you today as U.S. trade unions concerned about violence against Colombian trade unionists.

Colombia continues to be the most dangerous country in the world for trade unionists. More trade unionists are killed in Colombia than the rest of the world combined. In 2005 alone, 70 trade unionists were assassinated, bringing the total to over 2,220 Colombian trade unionists murdered since 1991. The Escuela Nacional Sindical (ENS), the National Labor School in Colombia, a well-respected NGO, has found that paramilitary groups are responsible for the greatest number of violations (49%) against Colombian trade unionists, with Colombian state entities a close second (43%), in cases where the assailants were known. According to the 2005 U.S. State Department Human Rights Report on Colombia, collaboration between paramilitary groups and the Colombian military continues. ENS has also reported that since 2002 Colombian state entities have nearly tripled their attacks on labor unions.

The Colombian government has also consistently failed to investigate and charge those responsible for the murders of Colombian trade unionists. According to information provided by the Vice President of Colombia, of the 2,220 murders of trade unionists from 1991 to 2005, only 1% of these murders ever resulted in jail time for those responsible.

U.S. policy towards Colombia has failed to address the ongoing violence against Colombian trade unionists. Instead, the U.S. supports a military that continues to attack trade unionists and collaborate with paramilitary terrorists and in essence supports a policy of impunity. The U.S. should not support the Colombian military. As unions concerned about the impact of U.S. policy on workers here and abroad, we believe that the U.S. should sharply cut back its massive aid to the Colombian military and should not approve a free trade agreement with a country that fails to prosecute those who murder trade unionists.

Colombian workers, along with much of civil society, oppose the continuing militarization of U.S. aid to Colombia as well as the Andean Free Trade Agreement. They advocate a more balanced foreign aid program that would direct more aid towards social and economic programs and the strengthening of the rule of law. Aid is needed to support the effective protection of Colombian trade unionists and prosecution of those responsible for the assassinations of trade unionists as well as sustainable development and viable alternatives to drug production and trafficking. Colombian workers also vigorously oppose a trade agreement that is based on the failed economic model represented by NAFTA.

If AFTA is approved in present form, it will replace existing worker right protections through U.S. trade benefit programs, eliminating the ability of the U.S. government to effectively use trade policy to gain improvements in worker rights in Colombia. Similar to NAFTA, CAFTA, and other free trade agreements, AFTA's labor provisions merely require Colombia to enforce its existing labor laws regardless of whether or not those laws adhere to internationally-recognized labor rights. Furthermore,

the enforcement and penalty mechanisms of the labor provision of AFTA are so weak that they provide no plausible leverage over multinational corporations and governments that abuse labor rights.

Since 2000, more than \$4.7 billion of taxpayer money has been sent to Colombia, 80% of which has gone to the Colombian military and police. Now the current Administration has asked for more than \$800 million for Colombia in FY 2007. Our unions represent over 6.5 million tax-paying workers who are concerned that U.S. policies are promoting a race to the bottom in terms of wages, working conditions, and respect for basic rights. How can we tell them that the U.S. is continuing to support a foreign military that both supports and commits violence against workers with impunity in Colombia and is now pushing a free trade agreement in country where unions-busting through assassination is common?

We urge you to support any measure that limits or decreases foreign aid to the Colombian military and to support any congressional initiative that ends additional military escalation of the conflict in Colombia. In addition, we would like to urge you to declare your opposition to the Andean Free Trade Agreement now. U.S. aid and trade policy should promote true democracy and protection of fundamental human rights, not a race to the bottom for labor rights spearheaded by the assassination of trade unionists.

Sincerely,

James P. Hoffa, President
International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT)

William E. Adams, International Secretary-Treasurer
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)

Ron Gettelfinger, President
International Union, United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural
Implement Workers of America (UAW)

John H. Hovis, President
United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE)

Joseph T. Hansen, International President
United Food and Commercial Workers International Union, CLC (UFCW)

Cecil E. Roberts, President
United Mine Workers of America (UMWA)

Leo W. Gerard, President
United Steelworkers, AFL-CIO/CLC, (USW)