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Resolution in Solidarity with Colombian Workers

Whereas the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) notes that 29 of 76 anti-union murders in 2011 occurred in Colombia¹, that at least 1000 labor activists were murdered or disappeared in Colombia from 2000 to 2010, and that 14 have been murdered or disappeared so far in 2012; and

Whereas, according to Human Rights Watch, death threats have increased during recent years while assassinations have become more selective; and

Whereas, in the words of the AFL-CIO, “brutal police repression is used to silence workers who exercise their constitutionally guaranteed right to strike”²; and

Whereas the Action Plan related to Labor Rights, agreed upon between the United States and Colombia in March of 2011 in order to address, among other concerns, violent repression targeting Colombian workers, (1) failed to impose specific requirements for its implementation, (2) did not address fundamental concerns as voiced by an ILO high-level mission in 2011, (3) has had almost no impact on Colombian workers’ access to collective bargaining, and (4) has failed to stop the brutal killing of union activists in Colombia and other forms of anti-union violence; and

Whereas the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the US and Colombia which went into effect in May 2012 does not even mention the Labor Action Plan, thereby likely increasing risk levels for union organizers; and

Whereas in the years following the passage of the Central American Free Trade Agreement, anti-union violence rose significantly in the Central American countries affected; and

Whereas food sector union SINALTRAINAL, which represents workers at Coca Cola, Sodexo, Aramark, and Kraft, among others, has suffered the murder of 25 of its leaders (including one in 2012), and whose leaders WILLIAM MENDOZA and JUAN CARLOS GALVIS are being falsely accused of pertaining to illegal armed groups by the Colombian State based only on the testimony of admitted former members of paramilitary death squads; and

<http://www.aflcio.org/Blog/Political-Action-Legislation/29-of-76-Unionists-Murdered-in-2011-Were-bian>
<http://www.aflcio.org/Press-Room/Press-Releases/Joint-Statement-by-AFL-CIO-CUT-CTC-on-U.S.-bia-Free-Trade-Agreement>

Whereas on November 9, 2011, armed paramilitaries forcibly entered the home of JUAN CARLOS GALVIS, tied up, threatened, and assaulted his wife and child, stole computers, USB memory devices, and cell phones, events for which the family was forced to flee its hometown of Barrancabermeja; and

Whereas the industrial oil workers' union Unión Sindical Obrero (USO), which represents over 22,000 workers, has been devastated by the assassination of 106 of its union activists since 1985, including two in 2012; and

Whereas thousands of illegally subcontracted oil workers affiliated with USO in 2011 in hopes of collectively demanding direct contracts with oil companies as required by the 2011 Decree 2025, in response to poor working conditions which include 16 hour shifts, working 21 consecutive days without a day off, 28-day contracts, and housing in remote camps with inadequate water and sanitary facilities; and

Whereas striking USO workers have been the victims of illegal union busting tactics in 2011 and 2012 at the hands of the Colombian State (the world's third largest recipient of US foreign military funding), which included (1) the immediate firing of 500 union workers, (2) the removal at gunpoint of thousands of striking workers from picket lines, (3) the conditioning of their reentry into the oil fields on their disaffiliation from USO, (4) the intimidation of USO leaders behind closed doors by armed military intelligence officials, (5) the unfounded arrest of several USO leaders, and (6) the refusal by the Colombian armed forces to allow USO organizers into the region;

Therefore Be it Resolved, that the San Francisco Labor Council goes on record as expressing its solidarity with SINALTRAINAL, urges the Colombian government to advance the investigation of the events mentioned previously which occurred at the home of JUAN CARLOS GALVIS and ensure that he and WILLIAM MENDOZA receive a fair trial, holds the Colombian government responsible for their safety; and

Be it Further Resolved, that the San Francisco Labor Council goes on record as expressing its solidarity with USO and its 1,800 workers currently on strike, urges Colombian national oil company Ecopetrol and Canadian company Pacific Rubiales to negotiate with USO, the legitimate union nationally representing industrial oil workers, and urges the Colombian Labor Minister to take substantial action in enforcing Decree 2025; and

Be it Further Resolved, that the San Francisco Labor Council calls on the Colombian government to re-examine the FTA in light of the continuing humanitarian crisis faced by the Colombian labor movement, to enforce the rule of law and Colombian labor legislation, and to guarantee that the promises made in the US-Colombia Labor Action Plan – including investigating all anti-union crimes in the past and increasing guarantees for the safety of union activists – are met; and

Be it Finally Resolved that the San Francisco Labor Council goes on record as expressing its support for practical international solidarity efforts to reduce anti-union violence in

Colombia, as proposed by the organization PASO International, including international observation and union-to-union partnerships, and encourages affiliate unions, the California Labor Federation and the national labor movement to support this effort.

Submitted by Robert Irminger, IBU, and adopted unanimously by the San Francisco Labor Council on November 26, 2012..

Respectfully,



Tim Paulson
Executive Director

OPEIU3 AFL-CIO 11

