

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 25, 2009

The Honorable Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

On behalf of the members of the International Workers Rights Caucus (IWRC) and House Trade Working Group (HTWG), we write regarding the June 29th meeting you are scheduled to have with Colombian President Alvaro Uribe. While we support your efforts to engage Mr. Uribe on the critical subject of promoting economic development in Colombia, we sincerely hope you use this opportunity to start a new serious evaluation of Colombia's labor and human rights situation, as well as discuss appropriate policy measures to eliminate extrajudicial killings, address alarmingly high impunity rates, and other issues impacting the security and stability of Colombia.

We know you share our concerns about the ongoing and increased violence against trade unionists in Colombia. In 2008, there were 49 murders – higher than in 2007 – and 19 unionists have already been murdered this year. The continuing impunity for these killings is also of serious concern as 96 percent of murders have gone unprosecuted.

As Members of Congress committed to the promotion of international labor rights and human rights, we hope that in your discussion of development and the pending Free Trade Agreement with Colombia, you emphasize the Colombian Government's need to resolve the structural barriers to upholding the rule of law and civilian control over Colombian society. As of yet, the Uribe Administration has not shown sufficient political will to end extrajudicial killings, dismantle and prosecute the paramilitary groups suspected of killing union leaders, prosecute the intellectual authors of such crimes, enforce measures to curb labor subcontracting schemes, and substantially strengthen existing labor laws. We trust that you will convey to President Uribe that a pattern and practice of behavior which demonstrate a full realization of these matters constitutes an indispensable prerequisite to consideration of any free trade agreement with the United States.

We strongly support the agenda of enhancing sustainable development and improving the human rights situation in Colombia and Latin America more broadly. Setting a high bar for Colombia is an important step to establishing a rule of law precedent in a world where social activists and labor leaders are all too often under threat. We appreciate your concern regarding this very important matter.

Sincerely,



PHIL HARE
Co-Chair, IWRC



DIANE E. WATSON
Co-Chair, IWRC



MICHAEL H. MICHAUD
Chair, HTWG