

The Profiteers Bulletin

Ending Canadian corporate impunity in Colombia

September 2014



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The "Caravan in Defense of Land" wraps up its journey in Nariño

On August 27th, local authorities and media participated in the delivery of a preliminary report from the humanitarian "Caravan in Defense of Land", which visited several municipalities in Nariño, Colombia beginning on August 20th. About twenty national and international organizations visited hamlets and small towns in the municipalities of Tuquerres and Samaniego over seven days, gathering testimonies and analyzing cases of human rights violations, as well as violations of international humanitarian law.

At the request of Colombian campesino network the National Agricultural Coordination, and the Network for Brotherhood and Solidarity with Colombia, 40 Caravan participants gathered a list of more than 116 cases divided among several themes. The report notes a high level of impunity for these cases, considering that only 44.8 % of them were officially reported and, among those reported cases, only 1,9% went to trial. Members of the Caravan believe that this situation is linked to fear on the part of local residents, which is itself the result of multiple threats and displacements, which have occurred following official reports of human rights violations.

The caravan report identified various problems leading

to human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law, such as the militarization of the region. The report states: « **The Colombian government has created, over the past several years, [what are called] Energy, Mineral and Traffic Battalions. At the beginning, in 2011, there were 11 battalions; today, in 2014, there are 21 in the country. These battalions protect foreign investments and the interests of multinational companies, including infrastructure, oil pipelines and mines** ».



In addition to the issues identified above, the region is also impacted by mining and illegal agricultural practises. In this context, the Caravan heard cases of sexual abuse -which are rarely reported due to the stigma associated with them-, criminalization, arbitrary detentions, illegal rulings and threats. Community leaders are often

victims of direct or indirect threats from the Colombian armed forces, as well as from the municipal government. The Caravan has worked to increase the visibility of the situation and to provided support for the community in making official complaints. As a result, the local human rights ombudsmen has promised to follow up on these cases.

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The problem that most impacted members of the Caravan, according to their report, is the issue of land mines. The report notes: « **As of December 2013, the Colombian Presidential Program for Integrated Action against Land Mines, had registered a total of 10,682 cases. In Nariño, 737 cases were registered, among which 66% of the victims were civilians and 34% were soldiers** ». All who participated in this humanitarian Caravan were able to feel the fear associated with walking into a region where, as one resident says, « **No one knows where the mines are. The only way to know is if animals are able to go there, then we can go as well** ».

The residents of the area have created the Committee

for Human Rights in the Mountainous Region, in order to face this difficult situation and to request a humanitarian way of removing the land mines. (Residents do not trust the Colombian army to do it). The Network for Brotherhood and Solidarity with Colombia has been organizing humanitarian caravans since 2001, in various regions of Colombia, as a way to increase the visibility of situations prone to human rights violations, and to support social and community organizing around these issues.

Source: Colombia informa, September 1st 2014.

Translation: PASC.

Militarisation serving extraction

The Colombian armed forces, with 281,400 military personnel, are the second largest army in all of Latin America, surpassed only by Brazil. Added to that are the 159,000 members of the National Police, a militarised police force that reports to the Ministry of Defence. In Colombia there are 6.2 soldiers per one thousand inhabitants, a ratio almost four times that of Brazil.

The surge in extractive mining and energy activities in Colombia over the last few years has come accompanied by the massive militarisation of the zones where the mining and energy sectors operate. The Colombian government has in recent years created what are known as Energy, Mining and Transport Battalions. Their growth has accompanied the policy of attracting foreign investment in the sector from multinational corporations for the implementation of the neoliberal extractive policy: the so-called 'mining and energy drive'. At the beginning of 2011 there were 11 mining and energy battalions, but by 2014 there were already 21.

The Mining and Energy Battalions are composed of

80,000 troops, accounting for 37% of all land-based Army forces, which they're a part of, and almost 30% of the entire armed forces.

The mass militarisation of the extractive zones has not meant greater security for nearby populations. Censat Agua Viva and Mining Wacht Canada warned that 'the regions rich in resources are the source of 87% of forced displacements, 82% of human rights and international humanitarian law violations, and account for 83% of all assassinations of labour union leaders. The purpose of these units, despite what would seem reasonable, is not to provide public safety but to safeguard foreign investment and the mining and energy extraction.

A number of these battalions are located within the premises of the companies or mines, as in the case of Military Battalion 15, located since October 2011 within the oilfields of the transnational Pacific Rubiales, in Puerto Gaitán, where the company also provides vehicles and fuel. Or the Energetic Transport Battalion Number 8, located on the lands and installations of Frontino Gold Mines in the municipality of Segovia, as indicated on the web page of the Ministry of Defence.

The collaboration between the army and investors is



fluid. As stated by the Army's director of operations, Colonel Jorge Arturo Matamoros Blanco, the army analyses the projects that the investing companies undertake and are assigned to the corresponding military division for their protection.

Even though the military authorities have always denied it, there is evidence that the extraction companies' protection leads to the negotiation of private 'agreements' between extractive businesses and the Armed Forces, in which the companies pay large sums to the army in exchange for security and the ability to carry out their plans. These agreements are secret but have come out in the media through investigative journalism or because the managers of the companies themselves have unashamedly divulged the information.

The affected local communities view the military deployments with distrust, as they don't feel their interests are being protected by the government security forces. They believe that the troops are there to ensure the extractive activities, in open contradiction with the communities' traditional ways of life and the environment that makes it possible.

The presence of the army has been accompanied by serious human rights violations in such areas, including rapes of women and extrajudicial executions of those who oppose the mining projects. One of many cases reported was the September 2006 murder of Alejandro Uribe Chacón, who opposed the huge mining project of

Kedhada SA in the south of Bolívar province, murdered by troops of the Nueva Granada Number 2 Anti-air Battalion and subsequently presented as an armed guerrilla who fell in combat, twelve days after having lodged a formal complaint that he was being persecuted by the army due to his having lodged complaints against the mining company.

Another significant case relates to the Army's aiding the entry of the Muriel Mining Corporation in Norte del Chocó, where it supported the company's activities despite a fraudulent public consultation, as ruled by the Constitutional Court, restricted the mobility of ancestral inhabitants within their lands, and provoked serious abuses and the internal displacement of indigenous and Afro-Colombian populations.

Thus it is obvious that even though these military units are deployed in areas where the conflict with the guerrilla insurgency has been most serious, which is the argument used by the government for their existence, the key goal is the defence of the transnational companies against the legitimate territorial rights of indigenous, farming and Afro-Colombian communities. This activity provokes major social conflicts, massacres and forced displacements directly related to the invasive policy, much of it carried out in collusion with the army, paramilitaries and companies.

Source: War Profiteers' News, April 2014, n° 41.

Translation: PASC.

Union Leader Assassinated in Colombia

As Colombia marks the International Day of the Disappeared, another unionist has been killed.

Union leader Edith Santos, from the oil sector, was shot dead on Friday about 130 kilometers from the capital Bogota, said official sources on Friday.

Two men on a motorbike allegedly shot her twice in the chest while she was working in her office in San Isidro de Chichimene, in the municipality of Acacias, Meta state. She died from her injuries later in hospital.

The Workers' Union for the Petroleum Industry (USO) said this latest murder was in addition to the murder of Marco Suarez, General Secretary

of the Central Union of Colombian Workers (CUT) in Meta, and that the murder has happened as the country



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marks the National Day of the Disappeared on Saturday .

The Ministry of Work requested an investigation into the murder.

Edith Santos was the president of a community association (CEJAID), as well as a leader of the National Union of Security Professionals (Sinproseg). She had been helping the communities of Meta to obtain an agreement over the hiring process of farmers in oil companies, according to official sources.

In December 2013, Juan Manuel Santos' government (National Unity, conservative) changed the hiring process, denying the right of community associations to mediate, regardless of their historical role in the areas where the oil industry was influential, such as in Meta- which has seen a recent boom in this sector.

In February, various local communities in Meta had protested against the executive order, and against new

projects by the company Ecopetrol.

According to a 2012 report by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), more than 2,800 union leaders and workers have been assassinated between 1984 (when data became available) and 2011 in Colombia, added to 216 forced disappearances, and 163 kidnappings, making Colombia one of the countries with the highest rate of this kind of homicide.

Carlos Miguel Ortiz, the coordinator of the project, then explained that “there [has been] a decrease since 2003, but we are still concerned because no years have a rate of under 30 homicides [of union leaders].” The report revealed that in 223 cases that led to a court trial, only 25 percent found an author of the crime. Their study showed that 14 percent of authors belonged to the paramilitary forces, 5.1 percent to guerrilla groups, and 1.7 percent to the state.

Source: teleSUR, September 2014

Canadian Multinationals in Colombia: War Profiteers

Colombia vies for 1st place as the most dangerous country in the world for union activists and 2nd place in terms of forced displacements. More than 85% of internal refugees and murdered unionists come from regions marked by mining and petroleum development. Canada, which has signed a free trade agreement with Colombia, is the primary country of origin for foreign investment in this sector, meaning that Colombia's most important petroleum and precious metals reserves are managed through Canadian capital markets. Yet Canada has no system for regulating the activities of its companies abroad, allowing them to act with complete impunity as they profit from political violence in this war-torn country.

This bulletin intends to break the silence.

We would like to thank the following unions for their financial support:



Public Service Alliance of Canada
Alliance de la Fonction publique du Canada



The members of **Projet Accompagnement Solidarité** **Colombie** are available on demand to visit workplaces and to participate in group discussions on the impacts of Canadian investments in Colombia, and the situation with unions in Colombia.

Don't hesitate to contact us.

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