

Labour Rights in Colombia: A Story of Violence

A deep-seated anti-union culture and persistently high levels of violence against the Colombian labour movement have resulted in low rates of unionization, job security and job safety for workers. Civil society groups advocated for these conditions to be improved before ratification and implementation of a Free Trade Agreement between Canada and Colombia.

KEY ISSUES

- Colombia is the most dangerous country in the world for trade unionists.
- Colombia's labour system is dominated by precarious work arrangements which fail to guarantee minimal labour standards, rely on outsourcing, and result in more than half of the labour force having no benefits or social security.
- Official unemployment figures from the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE) hide a reality of underemployment, since their definition of employment includes informal workers selling things on the street. More than half of Colombians live on less than the minimum wage, in extreme poverty.

QUICK FACTS

- Between 1987, when large scale murders of trade unionists began, and 2014, 2,942 trade unionists were murdered in Colombia. This drove down the rate of unionization from 17% to 4.9% as trade unionists were terrorized in order to put a chill on union organizing. It also resulted in keeping unions weak and wages miserably low, making Colombia attractive for foreign investment. Despite collective bargaining being a constitutional right, only 25% of unionized workers are able to negotiate a collective agreement.
- Colombia, the Philippines and Guatemala are the world's most dangerous countries for workers, according to the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC).
- Levels of violence against trade unionists continue to be alarming today. According to the National Labour School (ENS), homicides of trade unionists increased by 50% in 2013 compared to 2012, and violent attacks and attempted assassinations of union leaders more than doubled. 83% of attacks against unionists were directed

against union leaders and activists. The rate of impunity in cases of violence against unionists was more than 96%.

- Members of one oil sector union, the Unión Sindical Obrera de la Industria del Petróleo (USO), experienced 45 labour rights violations between January 2013 and August 2014, including two assassinations. In Puerto Gaitán, where the Canadian company Pacific Rubiales Energy operates, USO members and leaders experienced 24 labour and human rights violations, including death threats, harassment, arbitrary detention and homicide from 2011 to 2014.
- About 70% of Colombia's 22 million workers do not have social security or insurance/benefits provided through their jobs, many of which are part-time, temporary or repeated short term contracts devoid of social benefits and labour rights. Companies take advantage of this system to prevent unions from forming, to be able to fire sick or injured workers, and deny other labour rights. This is a violation of Colombia's Labour Code and of conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO). When Labour Code rights to benefits, insurance and social security are violated, employers face no repercussions or sanctions from the Ministry of Labour.
- Income levels in Colombia are generally low, with a national average of \$345 US monthly in 2013.

TAKE ACTION!

Demand that your Member of Parliament engage in an open and transparent debate on the human rights situation in Colombia and Canada's role in it. Ask that the Canadian government fulfill its legal obligation to conduct a thorough and meaningful human rights impact assessment of the Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement, including an analysis of the impact of investment.

For more information, fact sheets and the *Colombia in the Shadow of Human Rights Abuses* report, go to: www.pasc.ca

