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Minnesota leaders respond to meeting between Obama and Colombia President Uribe on US-Colombia Trade Deal *Say “No Deals until human rights are restored in Colombia”*

President Obama met today with Colombian President Alvaro Uribe to discuss U.S. foreign policy with Colombia including the Colombia Free Trade Agreement and Plan Colombia. In light of this meeting, community leaders in Minnesota gathered at 12:30pm today demanding that President Obama not push forth a U.S.-Colombia trade agreement until human rights are restored and the Colombian government permanently cuts ties with paramilitary death squads. In attendance were representatives from the Minnesota Fair Trade Coalition, Witness for Peace Upper Midwest, Colombian Action Network, Workers Interfaith Network, Resource Center of the Americas and others.

Gerardo Cajamarca, member of the Colombian labor union SINALTRAINAL International Mission, gave testimony of the links between the Colombia Free Trade Agreement and the corruption and violence perpetrated with the support of the Colombian government. “This isn’t just about labor union assassinations, which is terrible. It’s about a plan to be able to impose a free trade agreement that goes hand in hand with the paramilitary and violence.”

The Colombia Free Trade Agreement is considered the most controversial of three pending trade deals negotiated by the Bush Administration because of the extraordinarily high rate of human rights abuses and labor union assassinations. The bill is opposed by many members of Congress including Minnesota Representatives Betty McCollum, Tim Walz, Keith Ellison, Jim Oberstar, and Collin Peterson. President Obama also opposed the bill during his Presidential campaign.

Meredith Abby, from the Colombian Action Network said “Uribe’s government is the most vicious and corrupt in all of Latin America. Uribe is the president of the country that has the highest murder rate in the world for trade unionists. He is commander in chief of a military that international human rights groups, including amnesty international have documented work with paramilitary to torture, murder and kidnap its own citizens. ”

Organizers of the press event demanded that President Obama oppose the passage of the U.S.-Colombian Free Trade Agreement and cease military aid until Colombia shows concrete evidence that security and human rights have been restored for the Colombian people.

Alicia Ranney, Director of the Minnesota Fair Trade Coalition also urged the Obama Administration to work with Congressional members who recently introduced the Trade Reform, Accountability, Development and Employment (TRADE) Act (HR 3012) to ensure a fair way forward when negotiating future trade agreements. “This Bush negotiated trade deal is no place to start, especially in a country with such a sour record on respecting worker and human rights. Such rights are the basic tenets of the new TRADE Act, and should be a starting point for re-negotiating the trade agreement between the US and Colombia.”

Witness for Peace Regional Organizer Robyn Skrebes wrapped up the conference by saying “The international community must come together to demand that President Uribe respect human rights in Colombia. President Obama should not support a future trade agreement nor provide further military aid until the people of Colombia are free from government-backed terrorism.”

You can see a video of the press event today at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0rG26kff5Vo>

To read recent reports about the current situation in Colombia and to learn more about the TRADE Act.

[AFRO-COLOMBIANS: Systematic Repression and the U.S.– Colombia Free Trade Agreement](#)

TransAfrica Forum, May 1, 2008

[So Far to Go: Human Rights in Colombia](#)

Latin America Working Group Education Fund, April 2008

[Workers' Rights, Violence and Impunity in Colombia](#)

AFL-CIO, January 9, 2008

[Trade Reform Accountability Development Employment Act of 2009](#)

Citizens Trade Campaign, 2009

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