



May 21, 2010

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper
Prime Minister of Canada
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A2

Dear Prime Minister,

On behalf of the 3.2 million members of the Canadian Labour Congress, I am writing to urge you to withdraw Bill C-2, the legislation to implement the Canada Colombia Free Trade Agreement and suspend the agreement altogether.

Prime Minister, the ongoing murders of trade unionists, death threats against labour leaders and human rights defenders, and a secret police (the DAS) that has spied on government opponents and fed information to paramilitary groups resulting in threats to, and deaths of hundreds of people should be reason enough to suspend any further action to implement the Canada Colombia Free Trade Agreement until a fully verifiable and independent human rights impact assessment is carried out.

In 2009, forty-seven Colombian trade unionists were murdered. This year, twenty-five have been murdered just five months into the year. This campaign of terror on Colombian trade unions is a violation of Colombia's obligations under international conventions it has signed and agreed to uphold. It is an affront to the cherished Canadian values of protection for basic human rights and freedom of association.

A proposed amendment to Bill C-2 would have the Colombian government investigate and report on its own human rights situation. We do not have confidence in the Colombian government's ability to report truthfully on human rights in any way. Any credible human rights impact assessment must be carried out by an independent team of experts, whatever the country context. This is why Colombia has been the subject of numerous reviews by United Nations committees and special rapporteurs and the International Labour Organization.

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We are further concerned that a free trade agreement with a country at the centre of drug trafficking in the Americas will open new corridors of drug-running to Canada. This has been shown to be the case in Mexico where NAFTA opened up trucking routes across the United States border, contributed to massive unemployment and pushed thousands of migrants looking for work to the border region with many directly into the drug trade.

We dispute the claims that this trade deal is an opportunity to create jobs in Canada and in Colombia. What is clear is that this free trade deal will guarantee the rights of Canadian investors in the mining and oil sector which employ only one per cent of the working population of Colombia.

Prime Minister, in 2006 you said the following regarding trade with China:

"I think Canadians want us to promote our trade relations worldwide...but I don't think Canadians want us to sell out our values, our belief in democracy, freedom and human rights. They don't want us to sell that out to the almighty dollar".

The Canadian Labour Congress shares the same view of the three trade union centrals in Colombia - the Canada Colombia Free Trade Agreement should not be ratified under the current circumstances until a fully impartial, independent and verifiable Human Rights Impact Assessment is carried out and its recommendations acted upon by the Colombian government. To do otherwise would be tantamount to the endorsement of a corrupt and murderous regime that is engaging in a campaign of terror against all its opponents - trade unions, indigenous people, human rights defenders. This is not a country Canada should open up to preferential trade access.

Sincerely,



Kenneth V. Georgetti
President

cc: CLC Officers and Executive Assistants
CLC Executive Council