



July 18, 2017

Minister Griselda Restrepo
Ministry of Labor
Carrera 14 No. 99- 33
Bogotá, Colombia

Dear Minister Restrepo,

We appreciate your inviting us to meet with you during your trip to Washington, DC. We found the meeting to be informative and productive. We hope to continue our dialogue with the Ministry of Labor the U.S.- Colombia Labor Action (PAL), labor rights and the peace process and specific areas/cases of concern moving forward.

We agree with your assessment that the U.S.- Labor Action Plan (PAL) has furthered labor rights in Colombia in that it led to the creation of the Ministry of Labor, increased numbers of labor inspectors, more focus on sectors of priority concern (sugar, port, oil palm, flowers and mining) and helped to focus on attention on violence against trade unionists. Colombia has come a long way in the past 20 years when it comes to reducing murders of trade unionists. We appreciate all actions taken to improve protection for trade unionists. Yet we find the murder of at least 8 unionists in 2017 and the National Labor School (ENS)'s statistic that there was a 31% increase in violence against unionists from 2015 to 2016 problematic.

We also ask that efforts to reduce violence towards trade unionists be extended to other social activists. The violent trend against activists is alarming with 41 killed in 2017. You highlighted that the Ministry of Labor will be taking on the responsibility of collecting fines against companies who violate labor laws, a change we welcome. We hope this can incentivize employers to implement labor law. That said, we think that in the areas of eliminating third party contracting, putting perpetrators in jail for trade union murders and making the labor inspection system more effective and growing more labor unions who do not face major challenges to collective bargaining, more needs to be done.

In our meeting, we asked that you intervene concerning cases that WOLA received in 2016 and 2017 (see attached), as well as, the following:

1) WOLA serves as an international guarantor to the Buenaventura civic strike agreements. As such, we ask that you guarantee that the 12 commitments on labor issues negotiated between the Ministry of Labor and the Buenaventura civic strike committee on June 4 are quickly and effectively implemented. A high profile visit on your behalf to Buenaventura where you meet with port workers and unions to reinforce their just claims is highly recommended.

2) On April 29, Cartagena's port society and Contecar dismissed the following seventeen workers from their jobs after they joined the Port Workers Union (UP). According to the UP, the workers became members of the union due to growing salary inconformity, extensive work hours, non-existent break times, and frequent arbitrary firings of personnel who stated complaints about the poor labor standards.

1. JOSÉ MARIA MEZA NIETO.
2. ROVIRO JOSÉ BALLESTAS TORRES.
3. LUIS GABRIEL ALMANZA MERCADO.
4. PEDRO LONDOÑO GARIBELLO.
5. NEVER BALETA MONTERROSA.
6. UBALDO HERNANDEZ MARTÍNEZ.
7. VICENTE GIL GARCIA CASTRO.
8. ABELARDO OLASCOAGA RUIZ.
9. JULIO CESAR DE AVILA LAZA.
10. ALVARO LAGUNA URUETA.
11. ADALBERTO PEREA ROMERO.
12. JAIME LOPEZ SAUMETH.
13. LUIS VALDEZ CAMAÑO.
14. BORIS VILLADIEGO MARTÍNEZ.
15. CARLOS JOSE CONTRERAS RODRÍGUEZ.
16. CLIMACO SARMIENTO DE AVILA.
17. ARNOLD SUAREZ.

The firings led the *Central Unitaria de Trabajadores* (CUT), Colombia's largest labor federation, to issue a statement condemning this action. According to the CUT, these port companies violated ILO conventions 87 and 98 which protect worker's right to organize and freely associate. It is our understanding that these workers have not be reinstated or compensated. We urge you to take swift action to resolve this matter as soon as possible.

3) We were very saddened to learn about the April 2017 collapse of a building in Cartagena that left 18 persons dead and another 23 injured. Most of the persons killed were Afro-Colombian construction workers. This situation, aside from highlighting the dangers that false construction licenses can produce, is also emblematic of the country's general disregard for the safety and security of ethnic minority workers. We hope that

your Ministry will honor these workers by guaranteeing that their family members are compensated for the damages and by tightening work condition regulations for high risk manual labor throughout the country.

We look forward your official written correspondence on these most important matters.

Sincerely,



Mathew Clausen
Executive Director



Gimena Sanchez- Garzoli
Senior Associate

