

## WASHINGTON OFFICE ON LATIN AMERICA

### For Immediate Release

December 13, 2004

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### **WOLA Files Complaint With U.S. Trade Representative Seeking Review of Guatemala's Poor Labor Rights Record**

Today, the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) and the U.S. Labor Education in the Americas Project (US/LEAP) filed a joint petition to the U.S. Trade Representative seeking review of Guatemala's labor rights record. The submission was filed pursuant to the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP), a unilateral trade preferences program, which requires that countries respect international workers rights standards in order to remain eligible for trade benefits. Guatemala has been a near constant subject of review for labor rights violations since the inclusion of the labor clause in the GSP in 1984. Twenty years on, labor unions and employees still face substantial legal and practical barriers to the enjoyment of their basic labor rights. The failure of the Guatemalan government to adequately respond to this continuing crisis serves as the basis of this GSP petition. **WOLA and US-LEAP call upon the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) to accept the petition for review, demand that Guatemala bring its labor laws into compliance with international standards, and effectively enforce the laws already on its books.**

Early next year, the U.S. Congress will decide whether it will ratify the Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), which would extend bilateral trade benefits between the U.S. and Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic. But, there is substantial opposition to CAFTA in Congress, in part because many members believe the labor clause is too weak. As written, CAFTA merely requires that countries enforce their own laws, without regard to whether such laws adequately protect fundamental workers rights such as the right to free association, to organize and bargain collectively and to enjoy adequate conditions of work. **"Guatemala has failed to adequately protect these fundamental labor rights in its law, putting workers at a real disadvantage in the workplace. Further, Guatemala's enforcement record is abysmal. Employers and the government routinely violate workers rights with few if any consequences,"** says Jeff Vogt, Senior Associate for Rights and Development at the Washington Office on Latin America.

Today's petition is further evidence that Guatemala should not enjoy preferential trade benefits under existing law, much less a new agreement. **"Given Guatemala's track record, the Bush Administration should, by law, suspend Guatemala's current trade benefits, not 'reward' the country with a free trade agreement,"** added Stephen Coats, Executive Director, US/LEAP.

*The Washington Office on Latin America promotes human rights, democracy, and social and economic justice in Latin America and the Caribbean by facilitating dialogue between governmental and non-governmental actors, monitoring the impact of policies and programs of governments and international organizations, and promoting alternatives through reporting, education, training and advocacy.*