

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

January 13, 2005

Ambassador Robert B. Zoellick  
United States Trade Representative  
600 17th Street, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20508  
United States of America

Dear Ambassador Zoellick:

We write to express our strong concern about the United States' trade negotiations with Colombia.

When you notified Congress on November 18, 2003 that the Administration would initiate negotiations with Colombia for the proposed Andean Free Trade Agreement, we welcomed your attention to the need for Colombia to address the horrific level of violence against trade unionists. We were also pleased to see the recent *New York Times* story reporting that the issue of violence against trade unionists and wide-spread impunity are "an issue" in the trade talks ("Assassination is an Issue in Trade Talks" by Juan Forero in the *New York Times*, 11/18/04).

Unfortunately, it does not seem to be an issue taken seriously enough by the government of Colombia. While the pace of murders in 2004 is down somewhat from the level of 2003 (58 as of mid-November 2004 compared to 60 as of early-November 2003), more trade unionists were killed in Colombia this year than in the rest of the world combined.

Equally disturbing, there has been no perceivable progress by the Uribe government in addressing impunity. According to a recent report from Vice President Francisco Santos, the government has made little headway in investigating the many hundreds of unionist murders perpetrated during the past decade, and not one arrest was made in more than the 90 murder cases that occurred last year alone. Under President Uribe, the government has continued to allow the murders to continue with impunity. Indeed, over 99% of the 2,000 murders of trade unionists since 1991 have gone unpunished.

Trade agreements cannot bring prosperity unless they are built on a system of law and respect for basic rights, for workers as well as investors. The most basic of workers' rights is the right to life, a right that has been denied to thousands of trade unionists in Colombia. The right to justice for punishment of crimes is another fundamental right, yet justice is not served in Colombia, either.

While violence and impunity are the most prominent worker rights violations, there is also an urgent need for Colombia to reform its labor code to bring it into compliance with ILO standards and to effectively enforce its labor laws. The early decision by the Uribe administration to

disband the Ministry of Labor and merge its functions into the Ministry of Social Protection was an unfortunate harbinger of the President's lack of commitment to enforcing labor laws and respecting worker rights.

Frankly, we believe that significant progress on preventing and punishing violence should have been a pre-condition for initiating trade negotiations with a government with such an abysmal track record. We urge you to use the time that is left in the negotiating period to be sure that your counterparts in Colombia understand that the government must demonstrate significant progress in addressing the violence against trade unionists, impunity for those who commit this violence, and labor code reform and enforcement in Colombian law. These things are imperative if the Colombian government expects serious consideration of a trade agreement in the U.S. Congress. Further, we strongly urge you to include comprehensive, enforceable labor rights standards in the free trade agreement itself.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

*Lane Evans*

LANE EVANS  
Member of Congress

*Sherrod Brown*

SHERROD BROWN  
Member of Congress

*Rosa L. DeLauro*

ROSA L. DELAURO  
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*Sam Farr*

SAM FARR  
Member of Congress

*Stephen Lynch*

STEPHEN LYNCH  
Member of Congress

*Peter A. DeFazio*

PETER A. DEFAZIO  
Member of Congress

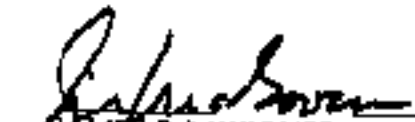
*Neil Abercrombie*

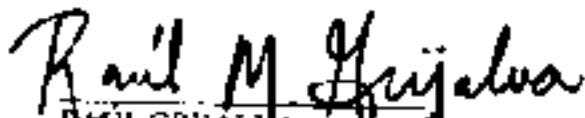
NEIL ABERCROMBIE  
Member of Congress

*Bob Filner*

BOB FILNER  
Member of Congress


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GEORGE MILLER  
Member of Congress



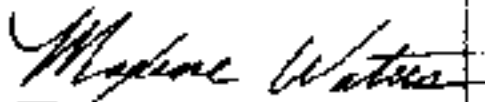
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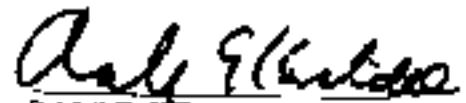
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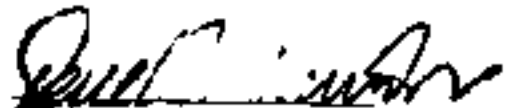
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