



July 5, 2011

The Honorable Max Baucus
Chairman, Committee on Finance
United States Senate
219 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Orrin G. Hatch
Ranking Member, Committee on Finance
United States Senate
219 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Dave Camp
Chairman
House Committee on Ways & Means
1102 Longworth House Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Sander Levin
Ranking Member
House Committee on Ways & Means
1102 Longworth House Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20515

MARY KAY HENRY
International President

ELISEO MEDINA
International Secretary-Treasurer

MITCH ACKERMAN
Executive Vice President

GERRY HUDSON
Executive Vice President

DAVE REGAN
Executive Vice President

TOM WOODRUFF
Executive Vice President

Dear Senators and Representatives:

On behalf of the more than 2.1 million members of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), I want you to know that SEIU opposes the proposed free trade agreement between Colombia and the United States. SEIU supports a trade policy that is part of a national economic strategy to ensure prosperity is broadly shared—both at home and abroad. This agreement, negotiated by George W. Bush, falls far short of that goal.

The consequences of failed U.S. trade policy—the shuttered factories, outsourced jobs, downward pressure on wages and the nation's massive trade deficit—are clear for all to see. When nearly 14 million American workers are officially unemployed and 25 million workers who desire full-time work cannot find it, the last thing we need is a trade agreement that will lead to more joblessness. Of course, not all are hurt by these policies. Multinational corporations—which in the past decade have cut their workforces in the United States by 2.9 million workers while increasing their overseas workforce by 2.4 million—do just fine by these agreements.

This agreement does not benefit workers in either the United States or Colombia. That is reason enough to oppose it. But there are other reasons to oppose this agreement. There were more trade unionists murdered in Colombia (49) in 2010 than the rest of the world (41) combined. We should not be rewarding such a country with a trade agreement.

The administration and Colombia have agreed to an action plan which aims to protect union activists and improve enforcement of workers' rights in Colombia. We do not know if the action plan will be effective or not. We are, however, concerned the action plan is not part of the trade agreement and lacks meaningful enforcement mechanisms. As Daniel Wilkinson from Human Rights Watch explained in *The New York Review of Books* ("Death And Drugs in Colombia," June 23, 2011): "The plan's most glaring omission is any mention of the powerful armed groups ... that continue to kill trade unionists and increasingly, leaders of displaced communities seeking to reclaim their lands."

We do know that workers are still being denied their most basic rights and the violence, and threats of violence, continue. Consider the experience of one of our partner unions in Colombia, SINALTRAINAL. On the very day that U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk announced that Colombia had completed the action plan goals for June 15, 2011, a member of

SERVICE EMPLOYEES
INTERNATIONAL UNION
CTW, CLC

1800 Massachusetts Ave NW
Washington, D.C. 20036

202.730.7000
TDD: 202.730.7481
www.SEIU.org

July 5, 2011
Page 2

SINALTRAINAL's negotiating committee, currently at the bargaining table with Sodexo, received an anonymous telephone threat, "Tell that man that he should be careful with his tongue or we will cut it out." While there is no indication Sodexo is behind this threat, it is still incredibly worrisome. This is only one more aggression against a SINALTRAINAL worker leader; an organization where more than 20 of its union activists have been killed; that frequently experiences threats against its national level leadership, some as recently as February.

Perhaps in the future, workers in Colombia will be able to exercise their basic rights without putting their lives in danger. That day is not here yet. If this trade agreement passes before the workers' rights situation is fixed in Colombia, then we have given up the one mechanism that could force real change in Colombia.

SEIU will add votes related to this issue to our Congressional Scorecard located on our website at www.seiu.org. Should you have any questions or concerns, contact Patricia Campos-Medina, assistant political director, at 917-744-0184 or at patricia.campos-medina@seiu.org.

Sincerely,



Mary Kay Henry
International President

MKH:JN:gmb

cc: Members, Senate Committee on Finance
Members, House Committee on Ways and Means

opeiu#2
afl-cio, clc