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## ACTIVISTS CALL FOR ACCOUNTABILITY FOR CHIQUITA'S TERRORISTS PAYMENTS, SPEAK OUT AGAINST TRADE DEAL

**Cincinnati, OH, May 26, 2011** – During Chiquita Brands' annual shareholder meeting today, a group of human rights activists, labor leaders and shareholders called on Chiquita CEO Fernando Aguirre to follow through on a commitment made last year to take decisive measures to respond to ongoing concerns about payments Chiquita made to terrorist organizations in Colombia. They also pointed to Chiquita's actions as a reason Washington should block a U.S.-Colombia free trade agreement.

"For 15 years, Chiquita paid millions in protection money to the two most brutal armed groups in the hemisphere," said Ken Crowley, of Witness for Peace. "Company executives knew that growing bananas in a war zone was dangerous. Rather than pulling out and risking their profits, they paid vicious killers to protect the business, despite the knowledge that the armed groups they were bankrolling were murdering thousands of innocent civilians."

Witness for Peace, a group that monitors human rights in Colombia, estimates at least 14,000 civilians were killed by Colombian guerrillas and paramilitaries while Chiquita made payments to the groups.

At Chiquita's 2010 shareholder's meeting, Witness for Peace delivered a petition signed by 1,300 concerned citizens from across the country demanding Chiquita apologize for illegal payments to Colombian terrorist groups, create a multi-million dollar fund for victims of terrorism in Colombia and immediately fire all employees involved in the illegal payments. CEO Fernando Aguirre committed to study the demands and respond. "...I am happy to read (the petition) and have my executive team go through it and in due time we'll reply back to you," Aguirre told the Cincinnati Enquirer at the time. Witness for Peace indicates the company has done nothing.

Daniel Kovalik, Senior Associate General Counsel of the United Steelworkers, said that the pending U.S.-Colombia free trade agreement will lead to more corporate abuse in Colombia and the undermining of human and labor rights in Colombia – the most dangerous country in the world for trade unionists, with 52 unionists murdered in 2010 and 7 unionists killed already this year. "First and foremost," Kovalik stated, "the passage of the FTA will amount to a reward for Colombia for its unprecedented anti-union violence and will be viewed as a green light for further violence."

As Kovalik further explained, "The Colombia FTA will benefit corporations, such as banana, palm oil and mining companies, in their quest to exploit more Colombian land and labor, many times by force, undermining human and labor rights and creating more internally displaced peoples in the process." As Kovalik notes, Colombia has just surpassed The Sudan as the country in the world with the largest internally displaced population.

The protestors had a clear message for Washington. "In the name of human and labor rights, the Obama Administration and the Congress must reject the Colombia FTA."

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