



**DECLARATION OF THE COLOMBIAN LABOUR MOVEMENT IN RESPONSE  
TO THE AGREEMENT ON LABOUR CO-OPERATION BETWEEN CANADA  
AND COLOMBIA RESULTING FROM THE COLOMBIA-CANADA FTA  
AGREEMENT**

We, the General Labour Confederation (CGT), the Confederation of Colombian Workers (CTC) and the Unified Central of Labour Unions (CUT), having met on January 21 in Bogotá, the capital city of Colombia, with representatives from the Canadian Labour of Congress (CLC) to analyze the Agreement on Labour Co-operation (ACL) of the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) signed on June 6, 2008, between the Governments of Colombia and Canada, jointly agree to the following:

The Free Trade Agreements currently under discussion have developed from a fundamentalist principle based on the Neoliberal Model. Because it is impossible through the World Trade Organization (WTO) to impose multinational company requirements on sensitive issues such as Intellectual Property, Medication, Market Access, Agriculture, Services, Subsidies, Antidumping Policies and Compensatory Rights, among others, these kinds of agreements are imposed and the only ones who benefit are the big monopolies such as Colombia Goldfields Ltd., B2 Gold, Coldcorp Mining Inc. and the Frontier Pacific Mining Corporation, instead of the majority of people from our country and from Canada. Everyone knows that “capital” knows nothing about “God” or “Country” when it comes to profiting from substantial benefits.

The political, economic, social, cultural, ethical and environmental impacts will be catastrophic for a country like Colombia which is not ready to open its domestic market because it is lagging behind in technology, has a low rate of consumerism per capita, a weak farming sector and, most importantly, because of the tremendous asymmetries that exist with the Canadian economy.

From our perspective, fair trade should be defined as the development and progress of the socio-economic, cultural and environmental rights of the Colombian society. Signing an FTA between Canada and Colombia would not guarantee these rights. As for labour rights and the freedom of association, the FTA is changing into a shameful reward for government and managers when it comes to violating these rights, forgetting more than 2,700 murdered unionists and letting their killers go unpunished. This only serves to perpetuate the neglect of the Colombian government in fulfilling the signed agreements concerning direct

requests and recommendations made by monitoring bodies of the International Labour Organization (ILO).

In the present circumstances, substantive protections to labour rights are not part of the agreement but exist outside the FTA in a parallel accord whose final provisions are centered on the discretionary criteria of the parties involved and not on independent legal action to grant the workers and representative union bodies the full exercise of their rights and freedoms.

In any case, these labour clauses do not provide true worker protection since they only focus on exercising existing labour laws rather than exerting pressure to improve current labour standards, whether or not these be related to the trade environment and regulated by the FTA.

The serious situation of human and union rights violations in Colombia, which have been internationally denounced at the International Labour Organization and in other fora that fight for human rights, could be tackled, albeit with difficulty, from their root cause by making the Government of Colombia pay fines. Colombia has not shown any political will to face this situation and commit to ending violence against its citizens, unions and managers.

It is clear that current Colombian labour legislation is aimed at rendering futile union rights, collective bargaining and strikes but instead is building a legacy of standards that deregulate and destabilize the work force, and seek more flexibility in order to lower market value and make prices more competitive for Multinational corporations who would not hesitate to move from other places to take advantage of the benefits. The well-known consequences of this are unemployment in the places they vacate and degrading poverty in the places where they move.

These deliberations coincide perfectly with that confirmed in the CLC document we have just seen, and there is common ground in the FTA diagnosis.

There is also a clearly political aspect to this matter: in signing the FTA with Canada, the Government of Colombia will pressure the U.S. Congress to finally approve the Colombia-USA FTA, by showing Congress that there will be a diversion of trade and that a country like Canada, which is known for respecting human rights and the environment, is able to sign an agreement with Colombia.

The Neoliberal Model has created a crisis — we do not know how, when developing nations are trying to protect their national production machines, guarantee sovereignty and food safety, strengthen inside markets and impose “protectionist” measures in general, how underdeveloped nations can be offered as a saving grace, while in reality, Free Trade Agreements result in the complete opposite. The Colombia-Canada FTA was signed behind the backs of the Colombian people, without any real participation from Civil Society and without any study on its impact. This is something that should be made clear to the Canadian Parliament.

We, the Colombian unions, are convinced that the stage set for the Agreement on Labour Co-operation is starting off on an uneven keel, and that the FTA will lead to an increase in human rights violations, thereby affecting the sovereignty of Colombia in economic, socio-political and cultural matters.

Under these conditions, the Colombian labour movement invites the Canadian society as a whole, and its Parliament, to demonstrate its solidarity with the Colombian people in mobilizing against and abstaining from signing an FTA, like those signed with the U.S., the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) and the one it intends to sign with the European Union, because these will only aggravate the already difficult situation of a country that does not deserve the situation it is currently facing.

Signatories

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