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Resolution to Support the Tribunal Investigating Murders of Union Leaders in Colombia

Whereas, last February 12-13 a delegation of nine unionists from the AFL-CIO, headed by retired Executive Vice President Linda Chavez-Thompson, visited Colombia to strengthen the solidarity of the union movement in the United States with Colombian workers, and showing concern because of the murders of union leaders and the annihilation of workers' organizations; and

Whereas, according to data obtained from the United Workers' Federation [CUT] of Colombia, in the last 20 years, 2,562 trade union leaders have been assassinated in Colombia. So far in 2008 paramilitaries have assassinated 24 union members, nineteen more than when the AFL-CIO visited Colombia, yet the perpetrators go unpunished. The Colombian government of President Alvaro Uribe Velez has done nothing to stop the genocide that is being committed against the union movement. In fact, central figures in the government have been shown to have ties to the paramilitary death squads; and

Whereas, because of the impunity of these crimes, and the crimes committed against the peasants, Indigenous, Afro-Colombians, students and the other popular sectors, many labor, social and non-governmental organizations are supporting the Peoples Permanent Tribunal, taking place in Bogota, Colombia, from July 21-23, 2008. The Tribunal intends to expose the many massacres, with a goal of obtaining the truth, justice and reparations that for so many years have been denied by the Colombian justice system; and

Whereas, the Tribunal has received accusations of crimes against humanity and violations of human rights committed by or for the benefit of transnational corporations, many of them from the United States, that operate in Colombia – including Coca-Cola, the mining company Drummond, BP, Occidental Petroleum, Monsanto, and Chiquita Brands; and

Whereas, independent investigations have established a clear link between many of these companies and the attacks against Colombian workers and their unions by the deadly paramilitary forces tied to the Colombian government. The United Steel Workers of America has spearheaded a suit against Coca-Cola in US courts, accusing the company of active complicity in the murder of union activists at their plants in Colombia. On May 12, 2008 the television investigative reporting program “60 Minutes” exposed the fact that the food giant Chiquita Brands made nearly \$2 million in regular payments to the paramilitary death squads in Colombia; and

Whereas, the AFL-CIO has strongly opposed the proposed Colombian Free Trade Agreement (CFTA), which like NAFTA would facilitate the export of jobs from the United States and the exploitation of cheap labor and resources in Colombia. The CFTA and the campaign to murder and terrorize trade union leaders and maintain a cheap labor environment, are two sides of the same coin; and

Whereas, the US government, through Plan Colombia, gives billions in US tax dollars to Colombia's government and military – money used to support violent union-busting in Colombia;

Therefore be it Resolved that the San Francisco Labor Council support the initiative of Colombian labor and human rights organizations to hold the Peoples Permanent Tribunal hearings in Bogota, July 21-23, 2008, to expose the continuing murderous campaign by government-supported paramilitary death squads against trade union activists in Colombia. Our union supports the struggle for the defense of Colombian labor organizations and the lives of their members; and

Be It Further Resolved that the Council join the AFL-CIO in opposing the proposed Colombian Free Trade Agreement; and

Be It Finally Resolved that the Council oppose any additional US aid to Colombia until it is clear that the Colombian government is vigorously prosecuting and punishing all those responsible for murdering union leaders.

Submitted by Dave Welsh, NALC 214, and adopted by the San Francisco Labor Council on July 14, 2008.

Respectfully,



Tim Paulson
Executive Director

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