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Dear Sir,

Justice for the trade unionists murdered in Guatemala - Guarantee of freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining

We are writing to you to demand justice for murdered trade union leaders and for a guarantee of freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining.

The recent sentencing of ex-dictator Efraín Ríos Montt to 80 years imprisonment for genocide and crimes against humanity by the Guatemalan Supreme Court of Justice is an important step towards building a culture of peace in Guatemala. The international trade union movement welcomes the fact that the Executive Power has respected the Court's findings and rulings.

We must now build on this victory, achieved as a result of large-scale mobilisation by Guatemalan civil society, extending it to cover all social sectors that have for decades been suffering under the burden of violence and impunity. The trade union movement in particular is one of the main targets of this repression.

In excess of 56 trade unionists have been murdered in the last three years alone, in addition to numerous cases of torture, kidnappings, raids and death threats which have created a culture of fear and violence. Violations of freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining have been constant during this period. This data has earned Guatemala the shameful title of the most dangerous country in the world for trade unionists according to the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC).

The current government claims to be different and that it needs more time to address workers' concerns. This has also resulted in an undertaking by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) to investigate crimes against trade unionists and violations of trade union rights, amongst other actions.

The international trade union movement was surprised to hear through the 2013 Report of the ILO Committee of Experts of the alleged advances that the government has made in a number of cases. It stated that progress had been made even though the report did not supply any concrete results regarding sentences.

The most worrying fact is that of the 58 murders acknowledged by the government over the last six years, the practice of trade union activities has been accepted as motive in only 2 of the cases. The other murders have been classified as so-called common crimes such as "extortion", "personal differences" or a "crime of passion".

We fully support social dialogue but we must act now. The international trade union movement and the victims' families would like these cases to be investigated and the perpetrators duly punished. Despite numerous promises and documents signed by successive governments, the truth speaks for itself: no one has ever been convicted in Guatemala for the murder of a trade union leader.

Guatemalan workers will not have the life that they aspire to, with decent work and social cohesion while the lives of trade unionists remain unprotected and while the ILO Conventions are not respected and implemented and violations continue to go unpunished.

We call on the government to advance social dialogue towards the genuine respect for freedom of association and the lives of trade unionists. In order for anti-trade union violence to cease, independent judicial investigations must be carried out without delay so that the material and intellectual perpetrators can be punished with the full force of the law.



Kwasi Adu-Amankwah

General Secretary