

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

Mr. Otto Perez Molina
President
Guatemala

Once again, the Trade Union Confederation of the Americas (TUCA), the regional structure of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), representing over 50 million workers in the hemisphere, is writing to you to demand justice for the murders of union leaders, and to guarantee the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining.

The recent judgment of Guatemala's Supreme Court against former dictator Efraín Ríos Montt to 80 years in prison for genocide and crimes against humanity is an important step towards building a culture of peace in Guatemala. From the international trade union movement and welcome the fact that the Executive Branch has complied with the findings and conclusions of Justice.

This victory, achieved through a profound mobilization of Guatemalan civil society, must now be consolidated, and extended to all sectors of society who suffer the weight decades of violence and impunity. The labor movement, in particular, continues to be one of the main targets of this repression.

Over 56 trade unionists were killed in just the last three years, in addition to numerous acts of torture, kidnappings, raids and death threats that have created a culture of fear and violence. An unrelenting series of violations of freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining remained constant during this period. These facts have garnered for Guatemala the shameful title of the most dangerous country in the world for trade unionists, according to the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC).

Mr. President, this government, over which you preside, upholds that your administration is different and needs more time to respond to the concerns of workers. It has also signed a commitment with the International Labour Organization (ILO) to, among other things, investigate crimes against trade unionists and labor rights violations.

The global trade union movement was surprised by the 2013 Report by the ILO's Committee of Experts, which claims supposed progress made by your government in a number of cases. While progress was reported in these cases, the report fails to share information on concrete results or sentences in a single case. Of most concern is that of the 58 killings admitted by the government over the last six years, only in 2 cases has the government declared trade union activities as the motive. The other deaths are included among the so-called common crimes such as "extortion", "personal differences" or "crimes of passion".

We support social dialogue, but there is no time to lose. The international trade union movement

and the families of the victims want these cases are properly investigated and the guilty punished. Despite countless promises and documents signed by the governments of the day, the truth speaks for itself: nobody has ever been convicted in Guatemala for killing a union leader.

Guatemalan workers will never have the lives they seek to build, with decent work and social inclusion, as long as trade unionists' safety and lives are not guaranteed, ILO Conventions are not respected or enforced, and violations continue to go unpunished.

We urge the government to advance from mere social dialogue to a real respect for freedom of association and the life of unionists. For the cessation of violence against unions, independent judicial investigations should be instituted immediately so that perpetrators, both the material and intellectual authors of these crimes, are punished to the full extent of the law.