

# Citizens Trade Campaign

P.O. Box 77077 Washington, D.C. 20013 (202) 778-3320 ph (202) 293-5308 fx [www.citizenstrade.org](http://www.citizenstrade.org)

**For Immediate Release:**  
June 18, 2004

**Contact:**  
Dan Beeton, 202-778-3311

## **U.S. Pursues Trade Agreement with Colombia Despite Notorious Human Rights Atrocities**

***World Leader in Murder, Repression of Labor Activists Would be Partner to Andean  
“Free Trade” Deal***

WASHINGTON – Labor unions and fair trade advocates condemned the Bush Administration’s secretive negotiations this week with Colombia, Ecuador and Peru to create a “U.S.-Andean Free Trade Agreement.” The U.S. is negotiating the possible trade deal despite Colombia’s notorious record of human rights abuses, which include the murders of 464 trade unionists in the past three years. The Colombian government’s complicity in human rights abuses has been underlined by recent statements by President Álvaro Uribe Velez that accused human rights observers of providing cover for terrorists and threatening to “imprison” and “deport” human rights workers from certain areas. The trade negotiations, which have been low profile, are scheduled to wrap up today in Atlanta, Georgia.

The rampant repression of trade unions and other labor rights activists in Colombia will almost certainly be a significant obstacle to passing the trade agreement in the U.S. Congress. The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions estimates that 95 Colombian trade unionists were murdered in 2003 and 295 received death threats – making Colombia “the most hostile country in the world for trade unionists.” 13 human rights defenders were also murdered in Colombia last year, and at the end of May, Uribe threatened American and international human rights workers in the Colombian region of Urabá with imprisonment and expulsion. Regarding the government’s complicity in rights violations, Human Rights Watch states, “President Álvaro Uribe has failed to break continuing ties between units of the security forces and paramilitaries and has failed to ensure that the perpetrators of crimes against humanity and serious human rights violations are brought to justice.”

**“Military and economic power in Colombia silences our communities’ demands for rights,”** says Luis Adolfo Cardona, a leader of the Colombian food and beverage union SINALTRAINAL. **“Our union and labor rights have been stolen in order to benefit the rich and corrupt – with the support of the corrupt president of our country.”**

**“That the Administration would even consider a trade agreement with Colombia right now is completely shameful,”** said Bill Klinefelter, Political and Legislative Director of the United Steelworkers of America. **“These negotiations demonstrate that the Administration has absolutely no regard for labor and human rights whatsoever.”**

**“A trade agreement of this nature with Colombia would be a new low,”** remarked Patricia Campos, Legislative Director for UNITE!. **“The Administration will have a hard time convincing members of Congress that any meaningful protections for workers can exist in a country where unions’ leaders are killed constantly.”**

The Citizens Trade Campaign (CTC) is a national coalition of environmental, labor, consumer, family farm, religious, and other civil society groups founded in 1992 during the fight over the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). CTC members include Alliance for Sustainable Jobs and the Environment; Americans for Democratic Action; Communications Workers of America; Defenders of Wildlife; Friends of the Earth; Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy; International Brotherhood of Teamsters; the National Family Farm Coalition; Public Citizen; UNITE!; United Methodist Church General Board of Church and Society; the United Steelworkers of America; United Students Against Sweatshops; and Western Organization of Resource Councils, as well as regional, state, and city-based coalitions, organizations, and individual activists throughout the United States.

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