

EDUCATION & LABOR COMMITTEE

Congressman George Miller, Chairman

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Miller to Uribe: Colombia Must Improve Investigations and Prosecutions of Labor Killings

Miller also criticizes Bush administration for delaying funding to assist reforms of the Colombian judicial system

WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Rep. George Miller (D-CA), the chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee, sent a letter Friday to Colombia's President Álvaro Uribe, asking his government to address concerns that Colombia has failed to adequately address the nearly 2,700 murders of labor union leaders in his country. President Uribe will meet with Miller and other members of Congress this week in Washington.

“Our two ally nations should work together to help Colombia improve its labor laws, decrease the ongoing violence, and finally put an end to the impunity enjoyed by those who have perpetrated thousands of anti-labor killings,” Miller wrote. “These challenges have taken on heightened significance this year as the violence in Colombia has escalated over 2007 levels.”

According to the *Escuela Nacional Sindical*, an independent Colombian think-tank, nearly 2,700 Colombian union leaders or union members have been murdered since 1986. The overwhelming majority of these killings remain uninvestigated by the Colombian Attorney General's Office. In addition, ENS statistics show that so far this year, more union leaders have been assassinated than during all of 2007.

Last year Congress approved \$39 million to assist the Colombian government in improving the rule of law and human rights. This funding included \$5 million for Colombian prosecutors to address the backlog of murder investigations. However, the Bush administration has delayed the distribution of these funds.

“Many members of Congress are very disappointed that the Bush administration has not transferred the funds that we appropriated last year to the Colombian Attorney General's Office,” said Miller. “If the Bush administration had not created these inexplicable delays, the Government of Colombia could have already hired even more investigators and prosecutors, and Colombia might by now be several steps closer to creating an effective and sustainable system of justice to address the grave problem of anti-labor violence.”

Miller traveled to Bogotá earlier this year to meet with Colombian government officials, judges, prosecutors, human rights advocates and labor union leaders. Since then the

committee's staff have continued to conduct additional fact-finding on Colombia's efforts to improve its judicial system and the need for further labor law reforms.

“One advantage stemming from our Congress’ decision to postpone the vote regarding the proposed Colombia Free Trade Agreement is that it has given my colleagues and me additional time needed to assess whether or not Colombia has in fact created an effective and sustainable system of justice to combat anti-labor violence,” wrote Miller. “I hope that this ongoing fact-finding work will allow Congress to provide helpful recommendations to the next administration in the United States over how we can further strengthen our nation’s relationship with Colombia in such a way that promotes increased trade and higher labor standards.”

Congress delayed the consideration of the Colombian Free Trade Agreement in April.

To read the letter to President Uribe, [click here](#).

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