

The US-Colombia Free Trade Agreement (FTA)

Colombia remains the most dangerous country in the world for trade unionists.

- § *More unionists are killed in Colombia nearly every year than the rest of the world combined.* More than 2,800 unionists have been murdered since 1986 (1 every 3.2 days for the last 24 years), with near total impunity. In 2010 alone, 51 more were killed and 21 survived assassination attempts. Human rights defenders are also targeted.
- § Faced with massive repression and threats, *the rate of unionization has been cut in half*, from 9.3% in 1984 to 4.2% in 2009, and less than 2% of unionized workers had a collective bargaining agreement in December 2009.
- § While the Obama administration negotiated an “*Action Plan on Labor Rights*” with the Colombian government to address these concerns, it is not tied to the FTA and therefore *unenforceable*. This is why the FTA is opposed by the AFL-CIO, UAW, SEIU, as well as numerous other labor and religious groups.
- § *U.S. Representative Sander Levin* of Michigan, ranking Democrat on the House Ways & Means Committee, after fact-finding trips to Colombia in 2009 and 2011, said about the FTA, “*Republic refusal to include in the implementing bill a reference to the . . . Action Plan on Labor Rights, and the Administration’s acquiescence to that refusal are totally unacceptable. As such, it is not satisfactory, and I will actively oppose it.*”

Small farmers and drugs: Without protections from U.S. agricultural imports subsidized by the U.S. government to the tune of \$24 billion per year, Colombian small farmers are projected to lose 16% of their income. When growing food becomes unsustainable, some turn to cultivating illicit crops such as coca.

Inequality and displaced persons: Agricultural provisions of the FTA will accelerate displacement. Land inequality in Colombia is among the highest in Latin America, and this unequal distribution lies at the heart of Colombia’s conflict. Colombia’s 5 million internally displaced people (IDPs) represent the world’s largest displacement crisis. The FTA will worsen this problem by accelerating land expropriation to benefit large-scale agro-export industries.

Afro-descendant and indigenous peoples: The FTA requires changes to the Colombian Constitution that would deny indigenous populations’ communal landholding status. It would also harm Afro-Colombians, who make up 26% of the population and are disproportionately being displaced from their resource-rich lands, as noted by TransAfrica Forum and the *Michigan Citizen* (Detroit-based newspaper).

Race to the bottom: U.S. corporations would have the right to challenge environmental protection, public health, and public safety laws in Colombia as “barriers to trade.” These “investor state provisions” in FTAs allow corporations to lower standards around the world.

Job loss in the U.S.: A September 2010 NBC News/Wall Street Journal poll found 69% of Americans think “free trade agreements between the United States and other countries cost the U.S. jobs.” They’re right: The Economic Policy Institute estimates that the Colombia FTA will result in the loss or displacement of 55,000 U.S. jobs.