

USLEAP

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Fighting for worker justice in the global economy



Mass protests at home, like this rally on August 11, 2009 and strong international condemnation abroad have so far failed to reverse the June 28 coup in Honduras. (photo credit: Giorgio Trucchi, Rel-UITA)

USLEAP Impunity Report: Little Progress in Colombia

A new report released in late September by USLEAP shows that the Colombian government made virtually no progress in 2008 by in addressing impunity for violence against trade unionists. In 2008, the Colombian government produced sentences in the cases of assassinations of 49 trade unionists. In the same year, 49 more trade unionists were assassinated (an increase over 39 murdered in 2007). Net progress on impunity in 2008 was therefore zero.

The report analyzes all sentences and convictions achieved by special judges in 2008. Special courts and prosecutors were set up in 2006 as part of an agreement with the International Labor Organization to prosecute cases of violence against trade unionists and began full operations in 2007. In 2008, USLEAP also produced a report analyzing the previous year's convictions.

New in 2008 were sentences resulting from the controversial Justice and Peace process, under which paramilitaries receive reduced sentences for confessions. Although confessions from the Justice and Peace process

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Unions Resist Coup in Honduras; US Response Criticized

President Manuel Zelaya, ousted in a coup in June, returned to Honduras on September 21, 2009, after this article was written, taking refuge in the Brazilian embassy. The coup government in Honduras has responded with violence against his supporters; the situation was deteriorating as we went to press on September 22.

Despite international condemnation and growing economic and political pressure, coup leaders have refused to permit the President to return to Honduras. Failure to reverse the coup poses a severe test to democracy and respect for basic rights, not only in Honduras but throughout the region. The Obama Administration, while quick to condemn the coup, is being increasingly criticized for not taking quicker and stronger measures to cut off all aid. The coup has also

exposed that CAFTA shackles the U.S. and other countries in the region from applying trade leverage even when a democratic government is overthrown.

Mainstream media have generally presented the coup as a power grab by Zelaya, casting him as aligned with the much-maligned Hugo Chavez of Venezuela. This portrayal obscures the fact that coup backers and opponents are largely split along class lines, with Honduran business and political elites supportive of the coup and trade unions and women's groups, among others, opposed. While a large increase in the minimum wage pushed through by the Zelaya government earlier this year is frequently cited as one basis for the coup, its roots go deeper.

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Colombia's Broken Hearts

On September 8, 2009, members of Congress returning to session in Washington, D.C. were greeted by the 8 to 13-foot-tall heart sculptures scattered throughout the city as part of a new public relations campaign by the Colombian government. The \$800,000 campaign consists of 40 interactive sculptures with tourist information, musical and theatrical performances, and free

Colombian coffee and flowers.

Advocacy groups launched their own campaign highlighting the Colombian government's violations of human and labor rights protesting outside of Union Station and hosting vigils and street theater. The sculptures will be relocated to New York City September 17.

Learn more: www.no-morebrokenhearts.net

(photo credit: Brandon Wu, Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch)



Impunity Report...

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have resulted in the identification of many intellectual authors, the overall weakness of this process means that in many cases material authors, state actors, and other case details will never be revealed, and many guilty parties will never be tried or sentenced.

More than half of the cases that led to sentencing of guilty parties resulted from the Justice and Peace process; the specialized investigators and prosecutors actually took fewer cases to specialized judges than in 2007.

The 2008 impunity report will be available upon request or on the USLEAP website after October 1.

USLEAP Submits FTA Comments to USTR

Findings of the 2008 impunity report formed the basis for a September 15 USLEAP submission to the U.S. Trade Representative arguing that the Colombian government has failed to take adequate progress in addressing violence and impunity or in addressing serious deficiencies in labor law and its enforcement, including permitting the use of subcontracting by employers to deny workers their rights.

USLEAP joined with a broad range of other groups who submitted testimony in issuing a common press release to bring attention on reasons in addition to worker rights concerns for opposing the Colombian FTA, including its impact on farmers, consumers, healthcare, and the environment. Copies of USLEAP's comments are available upon request or on the website.

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USLEAP

The U.S. Labor Education in the Americas Project is an independent non-profit organization that supports the basic rights of workers in Latin America, especially those who are employed directly or indirectly by U.S. companies. USLEAP is funded by individuals, foundations, trade unions, and religious groups. This newsletter is published four times a year. A minimum (tax-deductible) contribution of \$35 a year is requested; \$10 for students/low income.

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Background to the Coup

The day of the coup, the people of Honduras were to vote on a referendum proposed by Zelaya on whether to have a binding vote in November to form a constituent assembly to consider constitutional reforms. Zelaya's opponents feared that a constitutional reform would minimize the current economic and political power held by the elite in Honduras. Honduran members of congress and the Supreme Court attempted to halt the referendum by ruling it unconstitutional but Zelaya pressed ahead. Before the vote could take place, the military carried out orders to detain and remove Zelaya from the country. Speaker Roberto Micheletti was "elected" in his stead.

International Condemnation

International response to the military coup was immediate. All Latin American governments strongly denounced the coup and withdrew their ambassadors. The UN and the Organization of American States (OAS), supported by the U.S., also condemned the coup and refuse to recognize the de facto government as legitimate. In the U.S., faith-based groups and NGOs, including USLEAP, issued statements opposing the coup, as did the labor movement, including the AFL-CIO and SEIU.

Nevertheless, mediation efforts led by Costa Rican President Oscar Arias and backed by the U.S. and the international community have failed to secure Zelaya's return.

The situation in Honduras worsened as continued levels of violence and repression against members of civil society and Zelaya's supporters heightened. The de facto government suspended civil liberties, including freedom of association, shortly after the coup, and troops have since then controlled the streets. On-the-ground reports from Honduras claim thousands of human rights violations and twelve political assassinations,

including those of trade unionists, as well as rapes and disappearances.

Labor Movement Resists

Honduran unions have been leading popular resistance against the coup since the beginning. The three principal labor centrals in Honduras, the Unitary Confederation of Honduran Workers (CUTH), the General Workers Central (CGT), and the Confederation of Honduran Workers (CTH), called for a national strike until the restitution of institutional order and the return of Zelaya. Chiquita banana worker union members gave up a day's pay and more to participate in the general strikes and protests. Teachers unions, the largest in the country, went on strike, shutting down the education system while thousands of workers have joined peaceful protests that have been met with tear-gas, detentions, threats, and attacks against protestors.

The international trade union movement has continuously weighed in against the coup and in support of the people of Honduras and unions. The Trade Union Confederation of the Americas, the regional arm of the International Trade Union Confederation, condemned the coup and denounced the invasion and destruction of the head office of the CGT. Dockworkers unions have pledged to not unload Honduran-flagged ships.

Business Mostly Supports Coup

Big business in Honduras is staunchly allied with the coup. One

of the biggest backers of the coup has been the Honduran Maquila Association. Some Honduran maquila employers have reportedly forced their workers to take part in marches supporting the coup. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce and other industry groups in the U.S. also issued a July 11 statement that effectively supports the coup.

USLEAP requests to Dole and Chiquita to condemn the coup were rebuffed but four leading apparel companies have spoken out for democracy. In response to an initiative by the Maquila Solidarity Network, backed by USLEAP, Nike, Gap, adidas Group and Knight Industries, in a July 26, 2009 letter to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, called for a restoration of democracy in Honduras. But the vast majority of companies that cast themselves as being socially responsible have failed to condemn the coup.

Level of US Response Criticized

Within hours of the coup, President Obama made a statement in support of democracy and the rule of law. After mediation efforts failed, the U.S. suspended military aid and revoked the diplomatic visas of four coup leaders in late July.

As concerns about the levels of violence and repression escalated, the international community and Zelaya himself called on the U.S. government to apply more pressure.

On September 3, the U.S. revoked all visas for senior officials involved with the coup and cutoff of nearly \$32 million in aid, much of which had already been suspended. But the State Department has so far refused to categorize the situation in Honduras as a "military coup," a determination that would by law cut-off all funds to Honduras.

Lost in the debate about cutting off U.S. aid is the glaring fact that with CAFTA, the U.S. has lost the ability to apply trade leverage in the face of a

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Suggested Action

Dueling resolutions have been introduced into the U.S. House of Representatives. Co-sponsors are nearly equal, with 46 backing a resolution supporting the coup and 44 backing the resolution opposing the coup. In an August 5, 2009 letter organized by USLEAP, seven U.S. trade unions urged Members of Congress to co-sponsor H. Res. 630 opposing the coup.

Urge your representative to support democracy and human rights in Honduras and oppose the coup in Honduras by cosponsoring H. Res. 630, introduced by Rep. McGovern, D-MA.

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DAS Scandal Threatens Union Protection Programs

As previously reported, the government's top security and intelligence agency, the Administrative Department of Security's (DAS), was found this year to be conducting illegal surveillance of unions, human rights organizations, political opponents, and members of the judiciary. New disclosures threaten the integrity of a U.S.-funded program to protect trade unionists in Colombia. As the Latin America Working Group reports, "Information from the protection program about the bodyguards, the kind of protective measures and daily routines was evidently leaked to the DAS office conducting the illegal surveillance. In this way, the program that the Colombian government has established for the express purpose of protecting trade unionists and human rights defenders was used to undermine the very people it was designed to protect, in ways that may have even compromised their safety." As reported by *The New York Times* on September 17, DAS's illegal surveillance is continuing, despite being exposed and denounced.

Obama Pursues Military Option

Despite the multiple scandals in Colombia including the ongoing extrajudicial killings of civilians by armed forces, the DAS scandal (above), and the continuing revelations of close relationships between governmental leaders and paramilitary groups responsible for widespread human rights violations and crimes against humanity, the Obama Administration is showing strong support for the Colombian military and appears intent on pursuing a policy with Colombia that places a high emphasis on a military solution to the internal conflict and drug interdiction.

The Colombian labor movement has long opposed the militarization of

U.S. policy towards Colombia as reflected in Plan Colombia and its emphasis on military aid. Unfortunately, the Obama Administration's first foreign aid package, now circulating through Congress, maintains roughly the same level of military aid as last year and only makes some modest changes in improving economic aid.

Increased US Military Presence?

Even more troubling, there are strong indications that the two governments are considering a deal that would permit the U.S. military to use between two and seven Colombian military bases. While the U.S. government has yet to openly discuss any of the issues related to this possible agreement, Colombia's neighboring Latin American countries have expressed serious concern that these will become satellite bases for U.S. military operations in Latin America. U.S. presence

at Colombian military bases would strengthen relations with the Colombian military despite its ongoing, well-documented violations of human rights.

State Department Certifies Progress on Human Rights

The U.S. State Department determined and certified in September that the Colombian government has made sufficient advances in human rights to receive the full amount of military aid appropriated by Congress, about 30% of which is by law subject to human rights certification.

While the State Department's statement mentions its respect for Colombian human rights organizations, the freeing of these funds gives the Colombian government and its military forces the fuel to continue violating rights for another year. The Obama administration has missed an opportunity to stand up for human rights in Colombia. □

USLEAP Hosts Yessika Hoyos In a Midwest Speaking Tour

In the context of the many challenges for labor rights in Colombia, USLEAP celebrates the AFL-CIO's presenting of the George Meany-Lane Kirkland Human Rights Award to Yessika Hoyos, from the Sons and Daughters Against Impunity and for the Memory of the Fallen and the Lawyers Collective José Alvear Restrepo (CAJAR). Ms. Hoyos' has worked relentlessly for victims' right to truth and justice, especially in cases of violence against union leaders, including the case of the assassination of her father, Jorge Dario Hoyos Franco. USLEAP will host Ms.

Hoyos for tour in Chicago, IL and Madison, WI Sept. 27-Oct. 1. (See the USLEAP website for a tour schedule).



Yessika Hoyos testifies in front of the U.S. House Committee on Education and Labor about violence and impunity in Colombia in February 2009.

Banana Unions 10th Conference Approves 2010-2011 Action Plan

Members of all of the affiliate unions of the Coordination of Latin American Banana and Agro-industrial Unions (COLSIBA) met in Peru from August 4-8, 2009 to reaffirm the driving mission of the organization and to define new lines of actions for the next two years. COLSIBA represents most of Latin America's unionized banana workers, regardless of nation, ideology, or transnational (e.g. Dole, Chiquita, Bonita, and Del Monte). In recent years, COLSIBA has begun to move beyond the banana sector to other agricultural areas, including pineapple, palm oil, and melon.

The first two days of meeting were held by the Women's Coordinating body and resulted in resolutions to promote gender equality in the workplace. Following meetings focused on strategizing to confront the realities currently affecting these unions including the coup in Honduras, Fair Trade certifications, violence against unionists in Guatemala and Colombia, and issues facing migrants that work in these sectors, among others. Additionally, COLSIBA elected new leadership to guide the next two years of work coordinating campaigns to promote respect for workers in the banana and agro-industrial sectors.

Dole Campaign Reaffirmed

Earlier, COLSIBA leadership called for a reinvigoration of an international campaign against Dole. EUROBAN (the European Banana Action Network), USLEAP, the IUF (the International Union of Foodworkers) and COLSIBA will release an updated edition of the primary campaign document, *Dole, behind the smokescreen*, in October. English and Spanish versions of the document will be available on the USLEAP website.

There were no reported developments regarding a lawsuit filed against Dole in April that accuses the company of funding paramilitaries in Colombia



Participants in COLSIBA's 10th Conference included USLEAP Regional Coordinator, Suzanna Colclerd (back row, left of the banner), one of a handful of guests invited. (photo credit: COLSIBA)

to carry out assassinations of trade unionists.

Multi-Stakeholder Forum

The COLSIBA conference also discussed participation in a Multi-Stakeholder Forum (MSF) conference to be held in Rome, Italy in December 2009. A recommendation for establishing the MSF was approved at the Second International Banana Conference in 2005 to create space for all key actors in the banana industry to consider broad-based solutions to a range of issues, including respect for labor rights, the use of chemicals in workspaces, and the contracting of more women. USLEAP is the U.S. member of the MSF Preparatory Committee, joining COLSIBA, EUROBAN, the IUF, the UN's Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), and banana companies.

Fair Trade Concerns

At its conference in Peru, COLSIBA opted for now to defer any public campaigning against Fair Trade bananas in the hope that more dialogue will yield progress in addressing union concerns (see the USLEAP Summer 2009 newsletter, available on line or upon request, for a review of COLSIBA's concerns). The coordinating body for

Fair Trade, Fair Labelling Organizations (FLO), is involved in a series of meetings with the IUF, COLSIBA and others in an effort to reach a resolution on banana unions' and other unions' long-standing concerns regarding Fair Trade certification.

COLSIBA, however, denounced Rainforest Alliance's certification program and began preparations for a campaign. Rainforest bananas have been marketed in Europe for several years but yet to be introduced into the U.S.

Rainforest, and Fair Trade, are both marketing certified **flowers** in the U.S. market; flower unions in Colombia have criticized both certification schemes, saying that conditions on certified plantations are not acceptable.

Similarly, consideration of a Fair Trade label for **apparel** to be sold in the U.S. has sparked significant discussion and concerns from anti-sweatshop groups in the U.S. Several groups are in dialogue with Transfair USA to try to address various issues.

The global union federation representing apparel workers worldwide is opposed to any Fair Trade label unless it is limited to factories where workers are unionized and have a contract, i.e. a union label. □

Guatemala Complaint Exposes CAFTA Labor “Protections”

The experience of Guatemalan and U.S. labor unions with the first labor complaint filed under the Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) has amply demonstrated CAFTA’s inability to provide effective protections for worker rights. The very limited actions taken by the Guatemalan government in response to the complaint illustrates that CAFTA’s penalties for failing to address labor rights violations, including murder, are not feared, especially by employers.

The Obama Administration has been reluctant to rigorously apply the CAFTA process. Instead, it has pointed to meager measures by the Guatemalan government as a justification for delay, and has even introduced new steps in the process that lengthens the procedure.

The complaint was filed in April 2008 by the AFL-CIO and six Guatemalan trade unions, and uses several case studies to document illegal firings, failure to bargain in good faith, health and safety violations, and violence against trade unionists. In January 2009, the Bush administration issued a review of the complaint, essentially backing the substance of the complaint, but giving the Guatemalan government another six months to address violations.

On July 10, forty members of the House signed a U.S. congressional letter to Guatemalan President Alvaro Colom, initiated by Rep. Linda Sanchez, D-CA, urging President Colom to address worker rights violations and violence against trade unionists. (As of mid-September, President Colom had not responded to the Hill letter.)

On July 16, the Obama administration, however, announced the Guatemalan government had made enough progress to extend the review process for an additional period of time in which “pre-consultations” with the Guatemalan government would take place. Under CAFTA, if a government fails to adhere to its labor provisions,

the U.S. should request formal ministerial consultations with Guatemala. By entering into “pre-consultations” with the Guatemalan government, the U.S. is adding new steps to the complaint process that are not provided for in CAFTA.

AFL-CIO Visit Sparks Some Response

On August 10-11, 2009, the AFL-CIO met in Guatemala with workers, from the trade unions who filed the labor complaint to assess the steps allegedly taken by the government. The unions reported that many of illegally-fired workers who have been reinstated in response to the complaint have faced retaliation and new violations of labor laws. Back pay, and reinstatement orders for other workers, had not been followed. Some workers had been violently intimidated and threatened. And the head of the Sitrabi banana union, whose brother was murdered in September 2007, and other union leaders, have not been provided requested security despite receiving new life-threatening phone calls.

Following AFL-CIO reports from their field investigation, the U.S. government met with the Guatemalan Ministry of Labor, which then undertook new but seriously flawed inspections. The AFL-CIO is planning to gather additional evidence of violations this fall to strengthen its case but it is clear that the CAFTA trade leverage is producing very little movement.

Since CAFTA came into effect, violence against trade unionists in Guatemala has surged. Earlier this year, the International Trade Union Confederation declared Guatemala the second most dangerous country for trade unionists in Latin America, trailing only world-leader Colombia, with impunity near total. □

Free Trade Prospects Narrow in 2009

The Obama Administration continues to send mixed signals about how soon and how hard it will push for approval of pending Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) negotiated during the Bush Administration. Most analysts believe that the Panama FTA would be the first to be moved forward, then the Colombia FTA. Action on the Panama agreement this year is considered by some possible, but increasingly unlikely. There seems to be little chance of a vote on the Colombia FTA before 2010 despite a renewed lobbying campaign by the Colombian government and other supporters, including a particularly offensive “Colombian Hearts” campaign focused on New York and Washington, DC (see picture and story, pg. 2).

Events over the summer have underscored not only the ineffectiveness of Bush-era FTAs to protect worker rights (see left for story on the Guatemala CAFTA complaint) but also their inability to protect democracy in the face of a coup (see front page story). □

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coup. CAFTA has no provisions for a suspension of trade benefits in response to a coup. Trade sanctions are a much more potent weapon than aid suspension, particularly when the targets are political and business elites.

Honduran opponents of the coup are digging in for the long haul, forming a resistance movement that is focused less on the return of Zelaya than convening a national assembly to write a new constitution that would be more democratic and grant more power to average citizens.

A failure to restore Zelaya soon will provoke further unrest if the coup government tries to go ahead with elections scheduled for November. Any election held by the coup government will be denounced as illegitimate. □

Maquila Updates

FLA Tackles Russell Athletics

The Fair Labor Association (FLA) has taken a firm stance against Russell Athletics after finding that the company's closure of its Jerzees plant in Honduras in January 2009 was partly anti-union motivated. After a spring 2009 campaign led by United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS) prompted dozens of colleges to terminate business with Russell and interventions by the Worker Rights Consortium (WRC), the Maquila Solidarity Network and the Clean Clothes Campaign, FLA put Russell on probation at its June board meeting and gave the company 90 days, ending in late September, to resolve the situation. As a consequence, Russell has, among other steps, entered into negotiations with the CGT union in Honduras regarding the closure and the need to respect freedom of association at its other factories in Honduras. Russell's actions will be evaluated at the end of the 90 days.

Levi's In/Out in the Caribbean

After moving its production out of a unionized plant in the Dominican Republic earlier this year, Levi's indicated it would also withdraw from the only unionized apparel operation in Haiti. Anti-sweatshop groups, led by USAS and the WRC and joined by USLEAP, threatened a major campaign against Levi's which has positioned itself as one of the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) leaders in the industry. Levi's subsequently agreed to maintain production until December 2009 at the CODEVI Free Trade Zone (FTZ) in Haiti where unions

won a contract in 2004.

In a letter to USAS International Campaigns Coordinator (and USLEAP board member) Rod Palmquist, copied to groups including USLEAP, Levi's disputed any characterization that it had earlier "cut and run" from the Dominican Republic, saying it was asked by the manufacturer, Grupo M, to shift its production out of the Dominican Republic to Haiti but reports indicate that Levi's shifted the majority of its work to non-union shops in the Dominican Republic.

Mexican Union Asks USLEAP's Support

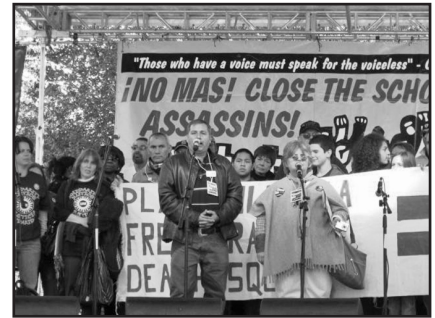
Union workers at an auto parts factory in Puebla, Mexico owned by Milwaukee-based Johnson Controls asked USLEAP in July to intervene with the company after it failed to respond to the union's February 2009 letter reporting anti-union firings, forced overtime, use of subcontracting, and compensation violations. A July 9, 2009 USLEAP letter to CEO Stephen Roell prompted a quick and detailed response from the company saying it had investigated the allegations of the Organizing Coalition of Workers of Johnson Controls (COT-JC) and "found them to be untrue." USLEAP is awaiting a rebuttal from the union to the company's claims. Actions may be suggested later this fall.



A march against the Honduran golpistas in Tegucigalpa on August 12, 2009. (photo credit: Giorgio Trucchi, Rel-UITA)

USLEAP to Attend SOA Vigil This November

Continuing a 3-year tradition, USLEAP will attend the annual SOA Watch vigil this year at Fort Benning, Georgia, November 20-22.



Images from last year's School of the Americas vigil in Fort Benning, GA. (photo credit: USLEAP)

The gathering, organized by Washington D.C.-based nonprofit SOA Watch, is an opportunity to mobilize support against the school which has a long history of training Latin American soldiers and policemen who, once graduated, too often go on to commit egregious human rights violations in their home countries, including violations against trade unionists.

USLEAP will help coordinate this year's Labor Caucus which provides an opportunity for the labor movement to discuss the labor and human rights violations perpetrated by SOA graduates, especially pertinent this year since the Honduran coup is led in part by the SOA-trained military.

Please look out for us if you are attending! □

Colombian Flower Workers Strike and Struggle

On Thursday September 10, 2009, members of UNTRAFLORES and workers from the Benilda Flower Plantation marched through the streets of Facatativá, Colombia to make their strike and demands public. Three days earlier, workers had gone on strike because they had not yet received all of their August salary. The company, owned by one of Colombia's wealthiest families, is also pressuring its 500 contracted workers to accept partial severance pay in exchange for their resignations or to transfer over to one of the cooperatives from which they contract, claiming the company is on the brink of bankruptcy and will not have money to pay full severance, as required by Colombian law.

The strike is the result of years of problems with the Benilda plantation, particularly the ownership's late payment of salaries and negation of its legal and negotiated responsibilities to the workers, including health insurance and pension payments. Since the beginning of the strike, workers have halted operations by taking over the plantation.

UNTRAFLORES, a Facatativá-based union of independent flower unions, is questioning the company's allegations of bankruptcy and their intentions to strip workers of their severance pay and other benefits, including social security and pension.

The same argument is being used by the Papagayo Flowers S.A. company, where SINTRAPAPAGAYO, member union of UNTRAFLORES, achieved a collective bargaining agreement earlier this year. Papagayo is also asking workers to accept partial severance pay in exchange for resignations because the plantation will allegedly be closing. Nevertheless, local cooperatives that provide subcontract workers to flower plantations are accepting applications and resumes for workers at Papagayo Flowers S.A. UNTRAFLORES believes that the companies' pressure and allegations are really only part of a plan to create a solely subcontracted workforce, a common anti-union tactic in Colombia.

Earlier in the summer, Colombian courts ordered the reinstatement of two workers from Papagayo who were fired for their organizing efforts but the company has refused to follow the court's orders. UNTRAFLORES and SINTRAPAPAGAYO have decided to move forward with additional legal proceedings against the company. The union is still demanding the reinstatement of two other workers.

New Test for New Owners of ex-Dole Plantations

As previously reported, in January 2009, Dole Fresh Flowers, a subsidiary

of the Dole Food Company, announced that it had sold all of its Latin American flower operations. Formerly the largest flower exporter and plantation owner in Colombia, Dole Fresh Flowers was the center of the years of organizing efforts by hundreds of flower workers supported by USLEAP. In summer 2008, workers finally won the first independent collective bargaining agreements with Dole Flowers, two of the first won by independent flower unions in Colombia. Dole subsequently announced it would be selling all of its flower operations in Latin America.

The new owners of the former Dole flower operations are the Nannetti family, one of Colombia's wealthiest families, and the New York based investment group Sunflower Enterprises Group, Inc. According to the new owners, they are now the largest flower producer in the country, managing more than 7,000 workers concentrated on 500 hectares in the Savannah of Bogotá and Rionegro, Antioquia.

Colombian labor law requires new owners to respect and uphold collective bargaining agreements in force at the time of purchase, and since the sale there have been no reports of contract violations by the two unions who won contracts, Sintrasplendor and Untrafragancia. However, the Sintrasplendor contract is up for renewal on September 30, 2009, posing a clear test of the new company's willingness to respect the union.

In another modest but important victory for an UNTRAFLORES union this summer, an arbitration tribunal ruled in favor of two workers, members of Sintracóndor, whose salaries were less compared to non-union workers on the plantation. The tribunal recognized that these workers were treated differently by the company in part because of their affiliation to the union. The tribunal also validated the two-year collective bargaining agreement that is up for renewal in September 2010. □

Help USLEAP Beat Supporter Attrition – Refer a Friend!

In an effort to reach new audiences so we can grow and remain viable as an organization, we are appealing to you to refer your family members, friends, and co-workers who share your values and interests and who find our work as worthwhile and pressing as you do.

If you know people who are interested in international solidarity work, labor rights, Latin American, and/or justice and equality, you can help us! Please take a moment to include the names and addresses of those who might be interested in USLEAP on the back of the enclosed reply card.

We'll send them a free copy of our newsletter, as well as a letter introducing them to our work. As a thank you for your help, if you send us at least three names, we'll send you a copy of *Gendered Injustice*, a educational booklet we produced earlier this year that gives a comprehensive overview of the struggle of female flower workers in Colombia.