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May 20, 2008

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper  
Prime Minister of Canada  
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Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

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Dear Prime Minister:

In light of the continued killing of trade unionists and other human rights activists and civil society leaders, and the recent revelations about the murders being excusable with a fine, we write to demand that you stop free trade negotiations with Colombia.

As leaders of Canada's four major public sector unions, with more than a million members working in public sector jobs across the country, we condemn the continued killing of trade union activists with impunity in Colombia. We further call on you to urge the Colombian government to immediately provide protection to those threatened and to bring the perpetrators to justice.

We were appalled to learn last week that trade union lives are being treated as tradable commodities in Canada's on-going negotiations with the Colombian government.

We are therefore taking the unusual step of writing to you and issuing a joint press statement objecting in the strongest possible terms to the possibility that Canada's negotiators would agree to the Colombian government paying a token monetary amount into a "cooperation fund" when a Colombian trade unionist is murdered.

This is abhorrent on a tragic scale. That your government should continue to discuss trade with a country that would suggest such a buy-off of human life is unacceptable and further trade negotiations must be rejected if we are to continue calling ourselves a fair and humanitarian democracy.

We agree with others who have stated that the idea of a country simply paying a fine for murder, as if it were paying a parking ticket, is not only non-negotiable but also an unforgivable violation of the principles of all democracies.

Surveys show Colombia to be among the world's worst human rights violators, reporting the killings of 78 trade unionists in 2006, 37 in 2007 and 25 as of the beginning of May this year. We ask you to publicly denounce the Colombian government for not providing adequate protection for its citizens and for failing to bring the murderers to justice.

We are endorsing the call for a public campaign to stop free trade negotiations with Colombia issued by the New Democratic Party and the Canadian Labour Congress. Along with the NDP and the CLC, we have repeatedly urged your government to stop negotiations with Colombia.

We urge you again now, in the name of one million Canadian public sector workers, to halt the negotiations until Colombia ceases the abuse of human rights and the murder of trade unionists and civil society leaders.

Yours truly,



DENIS LEMELIN  
Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW)



PAUL MOIST  
Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE)



JAMES CLANCY  
National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE)



JOHN GORDON  
Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC)

cc: Dr. Álvaro Uribe Vélez, President of Colombia  
Maxime Bernier, Minister of Foreign Affairs  
Jean Pierre Blackburn, Minister of Labour  
David Emerson, Minister of Trade  
Ken Georgetti, President, Canadian Labour Congress