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US EMBASSY IN COLOMBIA, ADD EMAIL
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26 August 2013

Dear Mr. Echeverri Lara and Mr Blanco Lozano,

We are writing on behalf of Workers Uniting, the international trade union bringing together the largest union in Britain and Ireland, Unite the union, and United Steelworkers (USW), the largest private sector union in North America, to express in the strongest possible terms our outrage at the recent detention of the trade union leader Huber Ballesteros. Together our unions represent more than two million workers across the United Kingdom, Ireland, Canada and USA and we are calling for the necessary steps to be taken to ensure Mr. Ballesteros is released without delay.

In July, Workers Uniting representatives travelled to Colombia to meet with Colombian trade unionists, grass roots organisations, politicians, and government representatives. Part of this trip was organised by Mr. Ballesteros. Our representatives, which included USW's National Director in Canada, Ken Neumann, met with him personally in the national headquarters of the CUT where Mr. Ballesteros works after his recent election to the CUT Executive Committee. We have also worked closely with Mr. Ballesteros for many years in his position as the Vice President of the agricultural workers' union FENSUAGRO, which is a Workers Uniting partner union. In 2011, Workers Uniting and FENSUAGRO signed an agreement titled "The Partnership for Life" which committed our unions to taking all necessary measures to guarantee justice for members of FENSUAGRO, which as you will be aware has been one of the most persecuted trade unions in Colombia. Mr. Ballesteros is also a National Organiser for the Patriotic March Social and Political Movement. As we understand, Mr. Ballesteros was arrested on 25 August 2013 at 1530 hours.

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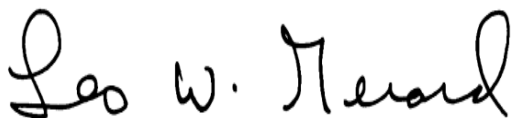
We were extremely grateful that your departments found the time to receive our delegation in Colombia last month and have been told that the meetings were extremely constructive and that there were commitments on both sides to continue to work together in search of strengthening democracy and improving the human rights situation in Colombia. We hope therefore that you will treat our concerns with seriousness and urgency and take the necessary steps that correspond to your department to ensure that Mr Ballesteros is released without delay. It is somewhat alarming that in spite of assurances that the current government is committed to demonstrating respect for trade unionists, opposition movements, and their activities, a trade union and peasant farmer leader as respected as Huber Ballesteros is arrested in what we understand as a clear effort to disrupt the work of the trade unions currently involved in organising industrial action in different parts of the country.

We know that since 19 August 2013 various trade unions have been organising strike action and that Mr Ballesteros, in addition to his roles in the CUT and FENSUAGRO which are both involved in the strikes, was one of ten spokespersons in the *Mesa de Interlocución y Acuerdo* (MIA), the body set-up to negotiate with the government. Democratic protest is a fundamental part of any democracy and we are extremely concerned that one of the lead organisers and strike spokesmen has been treated in this way.

Mr. Ballesteros is an internationally recognised trade union leader and we will be monitoring his situation extremely closely. He has travelled to the UK in the past where he has met with politicians and trade union leaders. Next month he was due to travel to London as an official guest of the TUC, the UK's trade union federation which represents more than six million workers, where he was due to speak at the annual TUC conference. During his visit to London he had also been invited to a series of meetings with members of the UK Parliament. There will no doubt be considerable interest in his case from all these parties. We urge you to do all you can to ensure that Mr. Ballesteros is released immediately and that full respect is shown to all trade unionists and social activists currently involved in the organisation of industrial action.

Thank you very much for your time and we look forward to hearing from you regarding the issues raised in this letter.

Yours sincerely,



Leo W. Gerard
USW International President



Len McCluskey
Unite, General Secretary