

# IWA: Solidarity with Colombian workers

The International Workers Association Congress in Manchester last December agreed that sections should hold actions targeted at Colombian embassies/consulates and business interests coordinated for July 20th, Colombia's 'National Day'. At the request of the Colombian 'Friends of the IWA', the day of action was called to highlight the ongoing war waged by the Colombian state on trade unionists.

Among the world's most repressive states, the US-backed regime of Álvaro Uribe Vélez continues to allow transnationals (for instance Coca Cola and the banana multinational Chiquita Brands International) and home-grown business interests alike a virtually free hand to snuff out opposition. Indigenous tribespeople, the Afro-Colombian communities as well as human rights activists have all been severely hit.

Likewise, for trade unionists death, direct threats and displacement are a daily reality.

As one of the sources of strongest opposition to neo-liberal economic policies, union activists are targeted by government security policies.



The Ministry for Social Protection is supposed to stimulate employment but in practice it monitors, hinders and restricts union activity, devoting its efforts to curbing union rights, to constantly trying to have strikes declared illegal, and to encouraging public authorities to harass organised workers and other protest movements.

Beyond this, paramilitary organisations regularly issue death threats and carry them out, often in collaboration with the Colombian military.

These paramilitary groups have been set up by politicians, businesses, drug traffickers, members

of the rural and military elites and representatives from foreign transnationals to protect their vested interests from 'subversives'. For instance

According to the International Centre for Trade Union Rights (ICTUR - [www.ictur.org](http://www.ictur.org)), at least 72 members of trade unions were assassinated in Colombia during 2006, an increase on the previous year.

The Colombian government always denies responsibility despite its well-known connections with the paramilitary groupings which carry out these executions in the name of 'national security'.

Although the state has recently encouraged paramilitaries to demobilise, human rights groups and others have severely criticised this measure because they can escape without being charged for loads of their past crimes.

At its April national conference, the Solidarity Federation reconfirmed its support for the IWA's call for a day of action on July 20th.

SF's activities will be coordinated by South London SF ([southlondonsf@solfed.org.uk](mailto:southlondonsf@solfed.org.uk)) and North & East London SF ([nelsf@solfed.org.uk](mailto:nelsf@solfed.org.uk)) who may be contacted for further details.