

# US LEAP

Spring 2013:  
Issue #1

Fighting for worker justice in the global economy

## ENDING VIOLENCE and IMPUNITY

With this issue of the newsletter, we begin a new feature section to give more focus to the issue of violence against trade unionists in Latin America.

Colombia has for over two decades led the world in number of trade unionists murdered while Guatemala has often been second, as has been the case the past several years. Final data from other countries has not yet been published, but it is likely that Colombia, with 18 murders in 2012, will continue to rank #1, despite a sharp drop from earlier years, and Guatemala, with a preliminary count of 10, will rank #2.

Violence against trade unionists, and impunity, also continues to plague other countries in the region, including Honduras, especially in the first years after the coup, and Mexico, where years of violent intimidation against one of the most successful and important labor rights NGOs in the country, were essentially ignored by local authorities,

finally forcing the closure of the Workers' Support Centre (Centro de Apoyo al Trabajador, CAT) in June 2012.

While many workers continue to organize for justice despite such dangers, violence and impunity have a chilling effect on the ability of workers to exercise their basic rights. The most fundamental right upon which other rights are based is the right to life.

Progress against impunity is critical. Unless perpetrators believe there is a reasonable chance that they will be caught and punished, violence will never end and will continue to be a powerful force repressing workers, depriving them of their basic right to organize to improve wages and working conditions.

### Impact on Wages and Working Conditions

There is no clearer example of the impact of violence and impunity on wages and working conditions in Latin Ameri-

ca than the south coast of Guatemala, where banana workers have for decades been unable to organize unions given the violent hostility of local employers. Wages and working conditions in the non-organized south coast are abysmal compared to those in the organized banana plantations on the Atlantic coast. Banana companies are increasingly shifting their production and sourcing from the unionized plantations on the Atlantic coast to the south (Pacific) coast, taking advantage of low labor costs that have been secured in large part because of repression, a perfect example of a race to the bottom fueled by violent intimidation of workers.

The past 20 years have seen an increased focus on worker rights in U.S. trade policy as well as the emergence of "corporate social responsibility," with advances in key sectors like apparel and bananas where companies are taking more responsibility for the conditions under which their goods are produced. But violence and impunity are still not being effectively addressed by national governments, international institutions, or employers. In the year of 2013, the murder of a trade union-

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Credit: Escuela Nacional Sindical

Colleagues move the coffin of Colombian union leader Juan Carlos Perez Muñoz, murdered on January 28, 2013 (see story, page 6).

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## Thank You

We are very grateful for the sustaining support of the hundreds of individuals who continue to provide the bulk of USLEAP's financial support. Income from individuals was a bit over \$100,000 in 2012, with gifts ranging from 50 cents to \$10,000 or more.

We also wish to take this opportunity to thank the foundations and unions who also made it possible for USLEAP to carry out its work in 2012, including

*21st Century ILGWU Heritage Fund*  
*Center for Democratic Education*  
*International Brotherhood of Teamsters*  
*Labor Council for Latin American Advancement*  
*Landau Family Foundation*  
*New Society Fund*  
*Rothschild Foundation*  
*SEIU*  
*United Auto Workers*  
*United Steelworkers*  
*UNITE HERE*

## May Day Labor Delegation to El Salvador

You need to move quickly if you're interested. *Deadline for applying is April 1.* The April 27-May 4, 2013 delegation is being organized by CISPES. Call 202-521-2510, contact alexis@cispes.org or visit the CISPES website, www.cispes.org.

## More Thank You

USLEAP wishes to thank long-time board member Brent Garren for his many years of service. Brent provided legal advice as needed and was particularly active in supporting USLEAP in its early years.

We also wish to thank Rocio Saenz, President of SEIU Local #615 in Boston, for her four years of important service that ended in December. Thanks, Rocio and Brent!

Finally, we wish to thank a great team of part-time folks who kept USLEAP running in 2012, including:

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# **APRIL is “WORKER RIGHTS ASSESSMENT MONTH” For LATIN AMERICAN TRADE AGREEMENTS**

April has become a marker for an annual assessment of the effectiveness of worker rights commitments in key U.S. trade agreements with Latin America. April 2013 marks the 5th anniversary of the filing of the first labor complaint under CAFTA, submitted in April 2008 on Guatemala, as well as the second anniversary of the signing of the 2011 Colombia Labor Action Plan that paved the political path for congressional approval of the Colombia Free Trade Agreement in October 2011.

April 2013 is also the first anniversary of the Administration’s decision to give up its most effective source of leverage on worker rights on Colombia when the President declared that the Colombian government had done enough to allow the FTA to be implemented, which was done a month later, in May 2012.

Effective, enforceable worker rights protections in trade are essential in the struggle for worker justice in the global economy, for workers in the North and in the South. Latin America is a key testing ground for worker rights protections in trade agreements, a central focus of the USLEAP agenda. Unfortunately, the

experience to date shows how far U.S. policy has to go.

## **CAFTA: Guatemala Labor Complaint**

The long-pending Guatemala CAFTA (the Central America Free Trade Agreement) labor complaint, filed by six Guatemalan trade unions and the AFL-CIO back under the Bush Administration, remains in limbo and has achieved little to date. Public threats by the U.S. government to take Guatemala to arbitration have not yet prodded the Guatemalan government to agree on a Labor Action Plan. Arbitration, which could lead to sanctions with a maximum fine of \$15 million, does not seem to be considered a significant threat by the Guatemalan business sector and government.

Leaked reports to the press also show that the draft Plan does not contain any measures to address violence and impunity (see page 5), perhaps the most fundamental worker rights violation in Guatemala. In January 2013, when Guatemalan trade unions released an analysis of worker rights problems, violence and

impunity headed the list.

USLEAP has long argued that the CAFTA labor chapter is weaker than the U.S. trade instruments that preceded CAFTA, i.e. the worker rights conditions of the Generalized System of Preferences, used by then-USGLEP and others to secure modest but important advances in Guatemala, including progress on impunity and a reduction of violence during the years when petitions were pending with the U.S. government. Under CAFTA, sanctions are weaker, standards lower, and murder is not being treated as a worker rights violation.

## **CAFTA: Honduras Labor Complaint**

Initial expectations of some progress in Honduras have been tempered, since there has been more talk than action in response to a CAFTA labor complaint filed in March, 2012 by two dozen Honduran trade unions and NGOs along with the AFL-CIO. In January, the Honduran trade unions released a document detailing extensive worker rights violations and put forth a set of recommendations that include increasing sanctions for violations, strengthening the Labor Ministry, addressing subcontracting abuses, enforcing minimum wage laws, and creating a Prosecutor’s Office for Labor Rights. (The document is available on the USLEAP website in English.)

## **COLOMBIA: First Year of the FTA**

A detailed assessment of compliance with the Colombia Labor Action Plan as of the second year will be produced later this spring but anecdotal evidence and continuing violence and impunity have strengthened the position of those who argued the Administration moved pre-

*continues on page 6*



*Union members in January, 2013 gather outside of the Labor Ministry office in Tegucigalpa, Honduras after unions released a set of proposals to address worker rights violations identified in the CAFTA labor complaint filed in March, 2012.*

## Violence and Impunity...

*continues from front page*

ist should always prompt a vigorous response from national governments, socially-responsible companies, and, if producing for the U.S. market, from the U.S. government. Instead, murder is too often treated as business as usual. It must be given higher priority, with zero tolerance.

In 2013, USLEAP's Violence and Impunity agenda will profile specific cases of violence and impunity to give a human face to the violence while seeking progress on emblematic cases.

### Emblematic Cases:

#### 1. Colombia: Hoyos and Perez

In Colombia, this will include the 2001 murder of Dario Hoyos and the much more recent murder of Juan Carlos Perez Muñoz on January 28, 2013, with

a particular focus on tracking down and prosecuting the intellectual authors of these murders. While there has been some limited progress in Colombia on impunity in recent years, virtually no progress has been made against the "intellectual" authors, those who funded and gave the orders to the "material authors," as the Dario Hoyos case, which was highlighted in the Winter 2012 newsletter, illustrates. Two gunmen were arrested early on and eventually sentenced, but Colombian authorities have done little to follow-up evidence in this case that could lead to those responsible for ordering the murder.

USLEAP has been working on this case with the AFL-CIO, whose President Richard Trumka has a personal interest since he knew Mr. Hoyos. In February, USLEAP worked with Mr. Hoyos's daughter Yessika Hoyos, a human rights lawyer who has been investigating this case for a decade, to prepare a list of specific investigative steps that should

be taken. Administration officials have agreed to raise the requested steps with their Colombian counterparts.

As reported on page 6, the murder of Mr. Perez comes in the middle of a critical labor conflict on La Cabaña sugar cane plantations that challenges the implementation of the controversial Labor Action Plan. Nevertheless, despite the high profile nature of the conflict, preliminary field reports indicate that local police quickly buried Mr. Perez without doing an autopsy or any forensic work at the crime scene.

#### 2. Mexico: The CAT and Blanca Velasquez

In Mexico, USLEAP will focus on the violent intimidation of the CAT that eventually forced its closure in 2012. In 2012, CAT staff person José Enrique Morales Montaña was kidnapped and threatened with death, one more incident in a series of acts that followed several years of violent intimidation, including 2011 death threats against CAT Executive Director Blanca Velasquez scrawled on the walls of the CAT office, a break-in of the CAT office, theft, and physical intimidation.

For over a decade, the CAT was the leading worker rights organization in Puebla, a critical actor in organizing efforts in the maquiladora apparel and auto parts sectors, contributing significantly to historic victories, including Kuk Dong (one of the first major victories of the student anti-sweatshop movement) and, more recently, at a Johnson Controls plant where workers kicked out the protection contract union and established an independent union with a contract.

#### 3. Guatemala: SITRABI and Marco Tulio Ramirez

In Guatemala, USLEAP will focus on the half-dozen murders of members of the country's oldest and strongest union, SITRABI, the banana union representing Del Monte workers, including the 2007 murder of union leader Marco Tulio Rameriz, brother of the general

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## MEXICO: Global Days of Action



Credit: Mia Fyll USLEAP

USLEAP joined with worker rights advocates and unions around the world on Global Days of Action from February 18-24 to draw attention to labor law deficiencies and specific labor struggles in Mexico. The week-long initiative was organized by global unions, including IndustriALL, and, in North America, by the Tri-National Solidarity Alliance (INSA), comprised of unions and NGOs in Canada, Mexico, and U.S. Most events in the U.S. consisted of protests or meetings at Mexican consulates where activists delivered a letter to the Mexican government urging a roll back of legislation weakening Mexican labor law and drawing attention to specific labor struggles. Actions took place in Austin, Boston, Chicago (pictured above), Denver, Detroit, Houston, Indianapolis, Kansas City, Los Angeles, Miami, New Orleans, New York, Portland, Raleigh, Seattle, Tucson, and Washington, DC. See *Mexican Labor News and Analysis* for a more detailed report on U.S. actions (<http://www.ueinternational.org/MLNA/index.php>).

secretary, Noe Ramirez.

#### 4. CAFTA and Violence

In 2013, USLEAP will also continue to challenge the view of the U.S. government that the murder of a trade unionist is not a worker rights violation under the labor provisions of the Central America Free Trade Agreement and not subject to its labor dispute process. USLEAP has been working with the International Labor Rights Forum with key congressional offices to push back against this interpretation and to urge the Administration to give more attention in particular to the issue of violence and impunity in Guatemala, within or outside the formal CAFTA labor complaint process.

Two primary demands of the Guatemalan trade unions in addressing impunity are to (1) increase resources for the executive and judicial branches for investigation, prosecution, and conviction of those responsible for the violence; and (2) transfer high profile murder cases to the UN's International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) for investigation and prosecution.

Guatemala's steps to address impunity and violence stand in stark contrast to those taken by the Colombian government in the past few years which, in large part due to international pressure, has significantly expanded resources at the judicial level (creating three special courts and assigning judges dedicated

solely to violence against trade unionists) and at the executive level (assigning a hundred more investigators and hiring thirty-four new prosecutors in 2011-12).

While the most relevant measure of progress against impunity are actual convictions and imprisonment of those responsible, resources must be adequate to the task, and accompanied by political will.

USLEAP will also look for other forms of leverage and policy initiatives given how ineffective the CAFTA labor provisions have been to date.

#### 2013 Focus on Violence

In 2013, USLEAP's Violence and Impunity agenda will therefore include the following:

- **Colombia.** Press the Colombian government to investigate, identify and prosecute those responsible for the 2001 murder of Dario Hoyos and the February 2013 murder of Juan Carlos Perez Muñoz.
- **Guatemala.** Press the Guatemalan government to increase resources for investigation and prosecution and move high profile cases, including SITRABI cases, to the UN's International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala.
- **Mexico.** Press Mexican authorities to investigate and prosecute

those responsible for violence against CAT Executive Director Blanca Velasquez and other members of the CAT staff.

- **CAFTA and Violence.** Press the Obama Administration to treat violence against trade unionists a violation of labor protections under CAFTA and make addressing violence and impunity Guatemala in particular a priority.

#### What Can You Do?

1. Continue to support USLEAP. Sign up on-line if you've not done so already to receive news alerts and periodic action suggestions (no more than one a month on average). Watch for specific requests for action on the Violence and Impunity initiative.

2. Act on U.S. Policy on Colombia: April 12 Deadline. Urge your Representative to sign on to a bipartisan congressional letter to Secretary of State John Kerry initiated by Rep. James McGovern (D-MA) and Rep. Joe Pitts (R-PA). The letter calls on the new Secretary to support peace, human rights, and development in Colombia, and represents the first comprehensive congressional letter to a Secretary of State on U.S. policy in Colombia in over three years.

## *New Initiative in the Apparel Sector*

In February, unions representing apparel workers in over a half-dozen different countries in Latin America, Asia, and the Middle East announced the formation of the International Union League for Brand Responsibility.

The League is a new initiative that seeks to hold apparel brands fully accountable for working conditions and basic rights in their supply chain. As long-time USLEAP supporters know, it has been difficult for apparel workers to win and sustain victories, outside of the collegiate apparel sector.

Included in the launch of the League were unions from the Dominican Re-

public, Honduras, Nicaragua, and El Salvador. More unions from other countries are expected to join in the coming months.

The first target of the League is Adidas. The League is demanding a global agreement with Adidas that covers its entire supply chain rather than focusing on problems at just one or two factories.

In support of the League's target, the United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS) in February launched a new "Badidas" campaign targeting Adidas, including a worker tour, with an initial focus on unpaid workers at a supplier in Indonesia, based on documentation from

the Worker Rights Consortium.

The League and USAS were highlighted during the 2013 Workers United convention held in early March in Milwaukee.

Workers United, an affiliate of SEIU, represents most of what remains of organized garment workers in the U.S. Earlier incarnations of the union included the historic International Ladies Garment Workers Union, ACTWU, and UNITE.

The League operates on a tight budget and accepts donations through its website, [www.adidasworkers.org](http://www.adidasworkers.org). ©

## **Worker Rights...**

*continues from page 3*

maturely to implement the FTA last year.

While the number of trade unionists murdered in Colombia has dropped sharply in the past two years, Colombia is still ranked first in the world and violence is still widely used to repress union organizing (see box).

The Obama Administration continues to closely monitor implementation of the Labor Action Plan and added political pressure comes from the Congressional Monitoring Group on Worker Rights in Colombia, but the U.S. government's leverage is now much more limited and, in USLEAP's view, will continue to be so until a labor complaint is filed on Colombia.

### **PERU: Substandard Laws Despite Stronger FTA Worker Rights Protections**

Meanwhile, the new, improved worker rights protections agreed to in May 2007 by Congressional Democrats and the Bush Administration and included in the trade pacts with Panama, Peru, South Korea and Colombia, remain untested. This is particularly troubling in the case of Peru, since its FTA went into effect over four years ago. Peru continues to lack not only a general labor code but has on its books substandard labor laws that govern two key export sectors, maquila and agriculture, allowing employers in these industries to deny basic rights to workers and provide lower standards, conditions, and pay.

Efforts to reform labor law in Peru to ensure basic respect for worker rights have consistently failed, most recently in 2012, despite long-standing promises by the Peruvian government to address labor law deficiencies made before securing U.S. congressional approval of the FTA in 2007.

### **Apparel Brands Want Labor Law Reform**

In a remarkable and rare display of companies getting out ahead of the U.S. government on labor law issues, six ap-

## **Colombia Case Study: Sugar Cane Workers at La Cabaña**

A case involving sugar cane workers illustrates on-going violence, lack of compliance with key elements of the Labor Action Plan, and the limits of current U.S. leverage, despite significant engagement on the case by the Administration and members of the Congressional Monitoring Group.

In November 2012, sugar cane workers at La Cabaña sugar mill in Colombia's La Cauca region organized a union to protest long days, wages below prevailing local wage, no vacation pay, and no overtime.

The mill is one of the two last hold outs among a dozen sugar mills in the region that have not ended the practice of using third party contractors, a key abuse targeted in the Labor Action Plan. Following a major strike in 2008, most other sugar mills in the region agreed to hire their workers directly. The Cabaña sugar mill, however, has continued to use intermediaries who employ workers on short-term contracts under far worse conditions, prompting the formation of the union last fall.

The company responded by de facto firing nearly 100 union members, including the entire executive committee of the union, and threatened union supporters with violence. The

company has military installations on its premises and its own armed private security guards, which the government bolstered with a contingent of anti-riot national police after the union formed.

The union refused to back down. Then, on January 28, 2013, a key leader of the union, Juan Carlos Perez Munoz, was gunned down outside his house (photo of funeral, page one). A compelling story of how he got involved in the union, and his murder, is available on the USLEAP website.

At presstime, fired union workers were, at great personal risk, conducting peaceful protests that began on March 6, a day after the Colombian government asked the union for more time to investigate the situation. The union responded that for nearly four months it had been asking the government to enforce laws banning intermediation without any response while workers were being fired, forced to disaffiliate to keep their jobs, and threatened with violence and intimidation.

The union is affiliated to Sitrainagro, the largest private sector union in Latin America, which represents thousands of other sugar workers in the region.

parel brands released a March 4 letter to the President of Peru, declaring that the law governing the apparel sector violated their own codes of conduct. The brands called on the Peruvian government to repeal the law, in effect supporting the union movement over the objections of national producers.

Brands signing the letter to President Ollanta Humala were New Balance, Nike, Phillips-Van Heusen, 47 Brand, Life is Good, and the VF Corporation.

The law (Decree #22342) essentially permits employers in the apparel-for-export sector in Peru to hire workers on

temporary contracts on a recurring basis, sometimes lasting for years. The short term contracts make it nearly impossible for workers to organize unions and exempts employers from other rights and benefits due permanent workers.

The law also violates international standards. USLEAP believes it is in violation of the labor conditions of the FTA labor provisions but no legal challenge has been made yet.

The Maquila Solidarity Network, the global union IndustriALL, the Peruvian NGO Plades, and the AFL-CIO's Solidarity Center worked with the brands to

bring attention to this issue.

## Substandard in the Agricultural Export Sector Too

Similar law applies to the agricultural export sector, allowing employers to indefinitely employ workers on short-term contracts.

The law allows a rate of pay that is effectively below the minimum wage, cuts normal vacation days by half, and provides fewer protections from arbitrary dismissal. Workers frequently toil 12-18 hours a day in the fields planting and harvesting asparagus, peppers, and other products for export to the U.S. and Europe, earning an average of just \$5 per day. Meanwhile, the large agribusiness firms that dominate this sector have reportedly grown enormously profitable.

A recent case exposing the law's anti-union bias involves Camposol, the country's most prominent agro-industry company and the world's biggest exporter of asparagus. Workers formed a union in January 2013. When their short term contracts expired a few days later, the company refused to rehire them and replaced many of them with non-union workers. According to Sitag, the Agricultural Workers Union in Peru, many of the union workers who lost their jobs had worked for the company for more than four years.

Camposol, which proudly advertises itself as socially-responsible, supplies markets in the U.S. and Europe. Key U.S. customers include Wal-Mart and Costco.

## USLEAP Contacts Costco

Camposol responded to USLEAP intervention by denying any wrongdoing but then threatened to sue Sitag for taking the workers' complaints to international advocates. USLEAP contacted Costco in mid-March and was awaiting a response at presstime. European groups have also approached Camposol.

Sitag is a member of the Coordination of Latin American Banana Worker Unions, COLSIBA, a long-time USLEAP partner. ©

## THREAT from TRANS-PACIFIC PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT GROWS

The biggest free trade agreement in modern U.S. history keeps growing. Japan announced on March 15 it would be joining negotiations for the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP), which already involve Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, and Vietnam. Other countries have also expressed interest in joining.

As reported in the Winter 2012 newsletter, the TPP threatens to roll back the

modest advances that have been made in strengthening worker rights protections in trade agreements. The majority of countries involved are reported to be opposed to a proposal put forth by the U.S. government, although leaked reports suggest that the U.S. proposal would only be a modest improvement over the May 2007 agreement and that it falls far short of what worker rights advocates and unions believe is needed for an effective enforcement clause. ©

## GM Workers Struggle Rolls On

Workers with work-related injuries who were dismissed in 2011 from a General Motors plant in Colombia continue to press the company for a resolution. Hunger strikes, a more than year long encampment in front of the U.S. embassy in Bogota, and protests at General Motors dealerships and auto-shows in the U.S. has so far failed to secure justice.

Witness for Peace has been leading grassroots efforts to support the ASOTRECOL workers (the association of workers and ex-workers injured at the plant). The UAW has also intervened with GM in support of the workers. Check the Witness for Peace webpage for suggested actions. ©

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## Chiquita...

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rights. A 2002 union organizing effort was met with violence; in response to a more recent organizing campaign over the past two years, the company fired union members and refused to bargain despite international campaign support from Europe and the U.S. and agreements reached with the company after meetings with COLSIBA, Euroban, the IUF, and USLEAP in 2011 and 2012.

The Noboa banana company, owner of the Bonita brand, has been in serious decline in the past decade. A decade ago the Bonita brand was the 4th largest in the world but the company has now slipped into a second tier level. The company is run by Alvaro Noboa, the richest man in Ecuador and a perennial presidential candidate.

## Guatemala: Another banana unionist murdered

The Guatemala union Unsitragua reported in February that another trade unionist in the banana sector had been murdered, on the Agropecuaria Omagua plantation, a producer for Chiquita. Preliminary and unoffical reports indicate that the murder may have been common crime, as the victim, Joel Gonzalez Perez, was reportedly carrying a large amount of cash. In any case, the perpetrators have not been arrested.

Chiquita, which moved quickly to conduct its own investigation, reports it has pressed local authorities to investigate the case and prosecute those responsible. Meanwhile, no progress has been made on investigating and prosecuting the multiple murders of Sitrabi union members, including the 2007 murder of Marco Tulio Gonzalez, brother of the General Secretary Noe Ramirez. Sitrabi represents Del Monte workers in Guatemala. ©

# New Gender and Anti-Sexual Harassment Agreement Signed with Chiquita

Banana unions have signed a new gender and anti-sexual harassment clause with Chiquita, following the 2011 International Women's Day campaign that targeted all the major banana companies demanding they address sexual harassment and gender discrimination in the industry.

The agreement was negotiated by the Tripartite Women's Committee of the Coordination of Latin American Banana Workers Unions (COLSIBA), the International Union of Foodworkers (IUF), and Chiquita.

Dole and Del Monte have not followed Chiquita's lead, once again positioning Chiquita as the only one of the three big companies to seriously engage with banana unions on labor issues at a regional level.

In 2001 Chiquita signed a worker rights framework agreement with COLSIBA and the IUF, which continues to serve as the basis of regular meetings to address on-going issues and periodically achieve significant advances, e.g. in 2012, the first contracts in over 20 years at suppliers in Nicaragua, and now the new anti-harassment clause.

A link to the text of the agreement will be posted on the USLEAP website once an official English translation has been made available.

## 2013 International Women's Day Campaign Focuses on Honduran Plantation

On International Women's Day (March 8), COLSIBA targeted the owner of the Tres Hermanas (Three Sisters) plantations in Honduras for refusing to bargain with a union and for firing union members. International support was led by the European Banana Action Network (EUROBAN) and the International Labor Rights Forum with support from USLEAP and others, with a focus on the owner as well as Tres Hermanas-buyer Chiquita and certifier Rainforest Alliance, which had previously approved Tres Hermanas labor practices.

USLEAP wrote Tres Hermanas owner Jose Lorenzo Obregon on March 7 urging him to sit down and negotiate with the Sitrainba union, which was legally-recognized in 2012, copying the letter to Chiquita and Rainforest

Alliance. Rainforest Alliance responded promptly to USLEAP on March 8, saying it would investigate the allegations and then moved quickly to set up a meeting with the banana unions in Honduras.

## Rainforest Alliance Targeted

Rainforest Alliance is a certification program founded to focus on environmental issues but subsequently expanded to include labor issues. While it has moved rapidly in the last decade to certify flowers, bananas, and coffee, among other labor-intensive products, unions and worker rights advocates have consistently rejected the integrity of Rainforest Alliance certification with respect to labor issues, especially core worker rights like union organizing.

Flower worker rights advocates in Colombia say that Rainforest Alliance has certified anti-union plantations and that working conditions are no better than at those that are not certified. COLSIBA has previously called for an international campaign against Rainforest Alliance certification in the banana sector; the IUF has also rejected the Rainforest Alliance scheme.

While worker rights advocates have given significant attention to concerns with Fair Trade certification, Rainforest Alliance has not received the same scrutiny even as it has moved to expand market share at Whole Foods, Costco and other retailers. COLSIBA's 2013 International Women's Day campaign is a step in rectifying the imbalance.

## Ecuador Union Plantation to Close?

The long-running Los Alamos workers struggle in Ecuador may be reaching the end. In February, the company announced it owed nearly \$100 million in taxes and reportedly began closing the Alamos plantations where workers have been constantly stymied by the Noboa company from exercising their basic

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Members of the Coordination of Honduran Banana Unions (COSIBAH) march on International Women's Day in support of the Sintrianba union at the Three Sisters (Tres Hermanas) plantations.