

South Bay Labor Council San Jose, California

Dear Brothers, Sisters and Friends,

We've received an urgent message from William Mendoza and Juan Carlos Galvis in Barranquilla, northern Colombia. They are leaders in Sinaltrainal (National Union of Food Industry Workers), representing workers in Coca Cola bottling plants. Their message says, "We fear for the lives of our union leaders. Please send protest letters to Coca Cola. The company is making war against us." Their words are anything but just a figure of speech.

Their fears are palpable. Sinaltrainal at Coca Cola has endured a history as terror victims that includes the assassination of eleven leaders and activists. I met William Mendoza in Barrancabermeja in 2002 when my union, Plumbers and Fitters Local 393, in San Jose, CA, sent me on a labor delegation to Colombia. Not long ago William's young daughter was grabbed into a car in broad daylight. The abductors were thwarted by his wife, who ran screaming into the street. She stopped all traffic and managed to free the traumatized four year old from the kidnap vehicle.

A few years ago masked paramilitaries invaded Juan Carlos Galvis' home demanding to know his whereabouts. They tied up his wife, sprayed her with red paint and threatened to kill their little girl. The thugs were frustrated and fled.

Both men have had to move their families to other cities. William says, "We have no choice but to struggle. We must protect our families and children, but struggle is our brother"

With the company refusing to bargain in good faith and demanding to impose an unfair contract, the workers mounted protests at bottling plants in various cities. They were attacked by the police in Barranquilla. A worker with access to a management office found photos of Sinaltrainal leaders in a copy machine. William says, "We are very concerned about the intended use of these photos. We fear for our lives and safety."

In 2001 and 2006 lawsuits were filed in the U.S. on behalf of Sinaltrainal by the United Steelworkers of America and the International Labor Rights Fund. The lawsuits charged that Coca Cola bottlers in Colombia "contracted with or otherwise directed paramilitary security forces that utilized extreme violence and murdered, tortured and unlawfully detained or otherwise silenced trade union leaders."

Labor disputes and collective bargaining for Sinaltrainal have never been smooth. Their process of serving the needs of the workers has always been under the gun. Today it seems to be a matter of life and death again. Juan Carlos Galvis once told the workers, "If we lose this fight against Coke, first we will lose our union, next we will lose our jobs, and then we will lose our lives."

We can act to prevent that outcome. We can help alleviate the danger by taking the time to do what they ask of us – send letters to Coca Cola demanding that the company protect the lives of Sinaltrainal members, activists and leaders. Urge the company to bargain in good faith for an orderly and peaceful resolution of the labor dispute. Demand an end to union busting violence, no more intimidation, no more threats – no more death! There is no moral, ethical or human reason to allow the Coca Cola Company to continue to be enriched by the lifeblood of the workers.

(There is a wealth of additional information available at <http://killercoke.org>)

Please send letters and/or make phone calls to one or all three of these company officials. Here is a sample letter, but do better, write your own. If you will send only one letter, please send it to Gary Fayard, as Director of Coca Cola FEMSA he has the most

direct responsibility for their bottlers in Colombia. Your individual letter is powerful, but if you can get your union or other organization to sign on, that would be all the more powerful.

In solidarity,
Fred Hirsch (Please forward this request to your lists, contacts and friends)

Dear Coca Cola Executive,

I have heard from the leaders of the National Union of Food Industry Workers (Sinaltrainal) in Colombia. I am writing to you to demand that the Coca Cola Company take action to bargain with them in good faith and reach a fair and adequate labor agreement.

It has been charged in open court that Coca Cola has contracted with or otherwise directed paramilitary security forces that utilized extreme violence and murdered, tortured and unlawfully detained or otherwise silenced trade union leaders. We also have learned that the company has dodged any objective investigation of such charges.

Coca Cola's union busting intimidation continues to this day in Colombia. Such uncivilized corporate behavior must stop. There is no justice in imposing an unfair contract. The company must sit down and negotiate a fair contract with Sinaltrainal workers so they and their families can work and live in peace. Until that happens, I will spread the word to my friends, my union, my church and my community to boycott the products of the Coca Cola company. It is up to you to allow justice to prevail.

Sincerely,

(you might also send a note to <WILLIAM MENDOZA
<hastasiemprewilliam@gmail.com>)

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