



STRONGER TOGETHER

CONGRESS

Irish Congress of Trade Unions

27 August 2013

His Excellency Mr Mauricio Rodríguez Múnera
EMBASSY OF COLOMBIA
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Dear Mr Rodríguez Múnera

I am writing on behalf of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions – which represents more than 800,000 working men and women on the island of Ireland - to express in the strongest possible terms our outrage at the recent detention of the trade union leader Huber Ballesteros and to call for the necessary steps to be taken to ensure Mr Ballesteros is released without delay.

In July, Mr Jimmy Kelly, Regional Secretary for UNITE in Ireland and Congress Executive Council member was part of the Workers Uniting delegation that 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. The representatives met with him personally in the national headquarters of the CUT where Mr Ballesteros works after his recent election to the CUT Executive Committee. They 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.

We were grateful that Government offices departments found the time to receive the delegation in Colombia last month and have been informed by Mr Kelly that the meetings were constructive and that there were commitments made to work 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 urge your Government to take the necessary steps to ensure that Mr Ballesteros is released without delay. It is 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 mass industrial action in different parts of the country.

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We know that since 19 August 2013 various trade unions have been engaged in strike action and that Mr Ballesteros, in addition to his roles in the CUT and FENSUAGRO which are both involved in the strikes, is one of ten spokespersons in the *Mesa de Interlocución y Acuerdo* (MIA), the body set-up to negotiate with the Government. We know the Fiscalía has just released a statement saying Mr Ballesteros will be charged with 'rebellion' and 'financing terrorism'. We are outraged and disappointed to see the tactic of imprisoning high-profile critics being used. 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 for your time and we look forward to hearing from you regarding the issues raised in this letter.

Yours sincerely,



David Begg
General Secretary

CC. Mr Eamon Gilmore, T.D., Tánaiste and Minister for Trade and Foreign Affairs