

21 June 2010

President Juan Manuel Santos
c/o Mauricio Rodriguez
Colombian Ambassador to the UK and Ireland
Colombian Embassy to the UK
3 Hans Crescent
LONDON
SW1X 0LN

Dear President Juan Manuel Santos

I am writing on behalf of UCU (University and College Union), the British trade union representing over 120,000 staff in universities and colleges in the United Kingdom.

Please find attached a motion carried at our annual congress 2012, expressing support for our colleagues held as political prisoners in Colombia, for the safety of those released and for Colombian civil society's calls for a peace process.

Specifically, we would like to express our concern about the cases of teacher trade unionists Dr Miguel Angel Beltran, Omar Alfonso Combita and Lilianny Obando.

We supported the campaign for Dr Beltran's release throughout his detention, and he addressed our national congress earlier this month.

We understand that following his release from prison Dr Beltran faced threats to his security, including the theft of information from his apartment, surveillance and the interception of his communications. In September 2011, Dr Beltran also learnt of plans for his assassination and was forced to flee the country. Despite numerous requests, your government did not provide Dr Beltran with protection. Our members therefore continue to be severely concerned for his wellbeing.

We are also concerned by the on-going disciplinary proceedings against Dr Beltran as a university teacher. This case is led by the Colombian Inspector General (Procuraduria), which does not have jurisdiction in public universities, and it is based on the same evidence that was already disproved during Dr Beltran's legal process. The case therefore appears to be completely arbitrary and we are concerned that it is yet another attempt to silence Dr Beltran's work as a university teacher.

We are also concerned that despite the release of Dr Beltran, those who defend public education have continued to be imprisoned as a result of their work. For example, Omar Alfonso Combita, member of FECODE, the Colombian teachers' union, was imprisoned on 2nd October 2011, along with student leader Jorge Elicier Gaitan, human rights defender Luis Alfredo Fernandez and popular musician Carlos Lugo. All participated in protests opposing your government's education reforms in 2011 and are being held on dubious evidence.

We also continue to follow the case of Lilianny Obando closely, and know that she faces a dubious legal process based on evidence ruled "inadmissible" in a separate

case, as well as a series of false accusations, threats and intimidations. We very much hope your government will do its utmost to protect Ms Obando and to put an end to the unfounded proceedings against her.

It is of extreme concern that Colombia continues to be a country where trade unionists and others in opposition to government are met with false accusations and imprisonment and where those who are under threat are denied protection.

We urge your government to take concrete action to improve the situation. The disciplinary case against Dr Beltran must be dropped, those held prisoner must be released and protection must be provided for those at risk.

We look forward to progress in this matter.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Sally Hunt', with a horizontal line underneath.

Sally Hunt
General Secretary

Enc

Copy: Rt Hon William Hague MP, Secretary of State for Foreign and
Commonwealth Affairs
HMA John Dew, UK Ambassador in Colombia
Justice for Colombia

45 Political prisoners and academic freedom violations in Colombia - *National Executive Committee*

Congress notes:

1. trade unionists and academics face severe human rights violations in Colombia;
2. 215 trade unionists have been killed since 2007;
3. hundreds of political prisoners, including academics, are held in Colombia's jails, severely limiting free speech and academic freedom;
4. former political prisoners and academics Dr Miguel Beltran and Lilianny Obando have faced continued threats, harassment and false accusations since their release;
5. the violations take place in the context of an armed conflict, and large sectors of Colombian civil society, including our trade union colleagues, are calling for a peace process to help end the abuses.

Congress resolves to:

1. campaign for the release of all Colombian political prisoners and for the protection of released political prisoners;
2. support the Justice for Colombia (JfC) campaign for a peace process www.justiceforcolombia.org/campaigns/peace/;
3. continue to affiliate to JfC and to encourage local branches to support their work.

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