



Trades Union Congress

His Excellency Mr Nestor Osorio
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our ref: euid/sr/ai/guzman
date: 01 October 2015
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Dear Ambassador

Farmer linked to Peace Community murdered

The TUC, on behalf of 5.8million British trade unionists, urges the Colombian authorities to take urgent action to investigate the death of Ernesto Guzmán, who was murdered on September 21 because of his connection to the San José de Apartadó Peace Community, and to at least deal with the scourge of paramilitary presence in the region by disarming and dismantling such groups.

On the day of Mr Guzmán's murder, several armed men came to his home, shot him and attacked him with machetes. He died later of his injuries. According to his friends in the Peace Community, to whom he regular sold produce, paramilitaries – who had a constant presence in his village and owned property next to him - had been putting Mr Guzmán under pressure to sell to them instead. He has paid a heavy price for defying these criminals.

Despite the welcome steps forward in the peace process, in which you have the TUC's support, peace is still distant for villagers in the area around San José de Apartadó. Ordinary life is difficult in the face of harassment and threats from armed paramilitaries who accuse the villagers of being guerrillas – itself a death threat given the treatment meted out to others similarly accused.

The Peace Community has suffered harassment and murder from its very inception, but has survived through the bravery and tenacity of its members in the face on ongoing violence. However, just because these men and women have the strength to defy those who do not understand or approve of their refusal to take sides in armed conflict it does not mean the government's duty of care is any less. The continued link between the paramilitaries and the security forces calls into question your government's commitment to protecting the community from them.

The safety of all people should be a priority for any government, but at this time when formal peace is being negotiated, the safety of those who never wanted any part of violence and war cannot be

ignored. Despite this, the lives of San José de Apartadó's Peace Community and their neighbours remain as fragile as ever.

Please convey to your government the TUC's dismay at the ongoing failure to address the issue of paramilitary threats and murders, an issue to which we have drawn your attention on previous occasions.

I urge – once again – your government to take the following steps: support the call for a full and impartial investigation into the threat and the presence of paramilitaries; make public the findings of the investigation; do everything necessary to ensure that those found responsible are brought to justice; and take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups and break their links with the security forces, in line with repeated UN recommendations. I also call for justice for Ernesto Guzmán and his family and a full, public investigation into the circumstances surrounding his brutal murder.

I look forward to hearing how your government is addressing this situation.

Yours sincerely,

FRANCES O'GRADY
General Secretary