



March 24, 2004

By Fax: 996-3443

The Honourable Bill Graham
Minister of Foreign Affairs
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON
K1A 0A6

**Re: Urgent need for international support to help resolve hunger strike
of Coca-Cola workers in Colombia, whose health is failing.**

Dear Minister Graham:

The Canadian Labour Congress recently sent you copies of letters to the executives of the Coca-Cola company and its subsidiary in Colombia regarding unfair layoffs in a number of its Colombian bottling plants. The workers affiliated to the Food Workers Union (SINALTRAINAL) had begun a hunger strike to defend their employment and their dignity.

That hunger strike is now in its second week. The health of the hunger strikers is worsening, some, indeed are in serious condition exhibiting symptoms of dehydration and accelerated loss of weight, dizziness, headaches, fainting, palpitations, chest pains, lack of sleep and depression. The union reports that one of the hunger strikers, Marco Tulio Rey suffered a pre-heart attack on March 19th and is in a very delicate state. All the strikers are kept under medical observation of by doctors and nurses.

The union also reports that the government and the company have remained silent about the hunger strike. On the other hand, Coca-Cola managers have demanded that Social Security (who provide health services) do NOT give medical attention to the workers from Coke bottling plants until they give up the hunger strike. We think this is a monstrous action on the part of the company.

Now the conflict is escalating. Six employees of the Bucaramanga plant have been suspended from their employment for participating in the hunger strike.

The union and many in the international community hold the Coca-Cola Company responsible for the health and life of the hunger strikers and call on the company's directors in Atlanta and Mexico to find an immediate solution to these acts of violence against its workers.

The union also holds the Colombian state responsible for its continued ineffectiveness in ensuring that the labour rights and work security of the strikers are respected. There are reports of attempts by the National Police to dislodge the hunger strikers in Bogotá and Barranquilla.

Also worrisome are reports that there have been paramilitary threats against SINALTRAINAL.

Minister Graham, we are urgently requesting that you instruct the Canadian Embassy in Bogota to immediately investigate the situation of the hunger strikers, and offer them any assistance that Canada might be able to provide. We also request that Canada use its good offices with the Colombian government to urge the latter to actively undertake a strategy to help resolve this situation by mediating an agreement that avoids more loss of life and the destruction of the trade union. We look forward to receiving the results of this investigation and these actions by the Canadian government, which, you can be sure, we will share with all of our members across Canada.

Sincerely,

(Original signed by)

Kenneth V. Georgetti
President

c.c. CLC Officers and Assistants
CLC Executive Committee
Hon. Claudette Bradshaw, Minister of Labour
Alexa McDonough, NDP
Embassy of Colombia in Canada
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