

HARRIS COUNTY AFL-CIO COUNCIL

AFFILIATE OF THE A. F. of L. - C. I. O.

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COLOMBIAN UNION LEADER, TARGETED BY DEATH SQUADS, TO CONFRONT COCA-COLA AT HOUSTON ANNUAL MEETING

William Mendoza Gomez, a Colombian trade union leader threatened with death by local paramilitaries, is ready to refute Coca-Cola's "self-serving, false claims" that the company and its bottlers in Colombia have "extensive, normal relations" with unions and bear no responsibility for the deaths of at least eight prominent members of his union.

A lawsuit filed in Miami by the International Labor Rights Fund, the United Steelworkers of America and Mendoza's union charges that Coca-Cola bottlers "contracted with or otherwise directed paramilitary security forces that utilize extreme violence and murdered, tortured, unlawfully detained or otherwise silenced trade union leaders."

Mendoza, the 40-year-old president of the Barrancabermeja section of Sinaltrainal (the National Food Industry Workers' Union), will be attending The Coca-Cola Co. annual meeting at the Four Seasons Hotel, 1300 Lamar St. in Houston, on Wednesday, April 16, as U.S. labor and human rights advocates mount a demonstration outside the hotel, starting at 8:45 a.m.

"I have been a production worker for Coca-Cola for 14 years," Mendoza says. "I'm one of 65 members of Sinaltrainal who are threatened with death by the paramilitaries. Bodyguards are with me all day, and some nights they stay in my house for increased security. My family has been victimized."

Mendoza is currently touring the U.S. to draw attention to the massive human rights violations committed in Colombia by multinational corporations like Coca-Cola that collaborate with paramilitary terrorist groups. The International Labor Rights Fund and Sinaltrainal have recently been involved in the formation of the Campaign to Stop Killer Coke, which aims to educate the public about Coke's well-documented, unsavory ties to armed anti-union thugs in Colombia.

"We are here to hold accountable Coke's largest shareholders and top policymakers, including Warren Buffett, Herbert Allen, Barry Diller and others who rank among the wealthiest individuals in America," says Ray Rogers, director of the Campaign. "We can't allow them to ignore the criminal behavior of Coke's managers and supervisors in Colombia any longer."

"Organized labor across America is standing up for the Colombian Coca-Cola workers whose lives are placed in peril every day they go to work in the bottling plants," says Richard Shaw, secretary-treasurer of the Harris County AFL-CIO Council.

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William Mendoza Gomez and Ray Rogers will be available for interviews with media representatives at the demonstration on Wednesday from 8:45 to 10:15 a.m. Also, telephone interviews with Sinaltrainal President **Javier Correa**, who is in Colombia, can be arranged through Ray Rogers, at (713) 645-3000 on April 15 or 16, or at (212) 979-8320 after April 16.

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