



April 28, 2009

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Mr. Michael Ignatieff, MP
Leader of the Opposition
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

Dear Mr. Ignatieff,

I write to ask you, as a champion of human rights and democratic development, to do what you can to delay the ratification of the Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement, currently before Parliament.

The prevailing assessment of the Canadian and Colombian governments, that all of Colombia's problems have been taken care of and the country is ready and open for business, is seriously lacking credibility.

The Canadian Labour Congress shares the view held by: Human Rights Watch; Amnesty International; the Interamerican Human Rights Commission; Colombian trade unions; human rights advocates; victims of violence; Colombian judges; prosecutors; government oversight staff; journalists; legislators; and Afro-Colombian, indigenous and other community leaders, among others. These aforementioned Colombians are the driving forces toward a more just society. They have all called for caution in initiating free trade with the Colombian government, until there is demonstrable improvements in its record on human rights and an end to the impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators of these human rights violations.

Trade can contribute to a country's social and economic development, but only if trade policy supports, not undermines, human rights and development policy goals. Experts have concluded, given the context of violence against trade unionists and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of peasants from their resource rich land, the trade measures in the Colombia FTA will exacerbate the human rights crisis, while the labour rights and environmental provisions in the deal are ineffectual.

I urge you and the Liberal Caucus to support the recommendation of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on International Trade (CIIT) for an "impartial human rights impact assessment (to) be carried out by a competent body, which is subject to independent levels of scrutiny and validation." The

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CIIT report further stated that “the recommendations of this assessment should be addressed before Canada considers ratifying and implementing an agreement with Colombia.”

If Prime Minister Harper and President Uribe are correct in their claims that conditions have improved and human rights violations have decreased, a CIIT assessment would make this clear. We are calling on you and the Liberal Caucus for due diligence in this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Georgetti', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Kenneth V. Georgetti
President

c.c. Officers and Assistants
Executive Committee