

Michael Ignatieff  
Liberal Party Leader and Representative for Etobicoke—Lakeshore  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1A 0A6

April 30, 2009

Dear Mr. Ignatieff,

We the undersigned are deeply concerned that Canada would abandon its values and its support of internationally recognized human rights in order to gain economic advantage for its companies at the expense of millions of displaced, impoverished Colombians.

The government of Colombia has one of the worst trade union and human rights records in the world. According to the United Nations, the humanitarian crisis in Colombia is the worst in the hemisphere. Under President Alvaro Uribe's watch, more than two million people have been displaced from their resource rich territories, while thousands of trade unionists, peasants, indigenous peoples, Afro-Colombians and activists have been killed by the state and affiliated paramilitary organizations.

In spite of Canadian government assurances that security has improved in Colombia, the murder count for unionized workers increased 25 percent between 2007 and 2008. In fact, over 60 percent of trade unionists killed globally are killed in Colombia, while the conviction rate for these crimes remains at only three percent. With this level of impunity, there is very little incentive for the perpetrators to stop.

The Uribe government continues inaccurately to denounce union members and other human rights defenders as guerrillas, statements that only encourage paramilitary groups to continue putting workers and other civilians in extreme jeopardy. At the same time, the government is mired in corruption, electoral fraud and complicity with drug lords and death squad leaders. For these reasons, the International Criminal Court in The Hague is assessing whether representatives of the Colombian government are guilty of crimes against humanity.

Mr. Ignatieff, despite growing opposition from many Canadians, ongoing opposition in the United States Congress to a similar agreement with Colombia, and Norway's recent decision to put their own Colombian deal on hold pending improvements in human rights, Prime Minister Stephen Harper seems driven to push this bad deal forward.

Let us be clear – a vote against this deal is not a vote against trade.

Experts have concluded that given the context of violence and displacement 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. The environmental side agreement of the Canada-Colombia FTA

does not even meet NAFTA standards. Trade can support development and the realization of human rights, but neither the political conditions in Colombia nor the terms of this FTA meet the criteria that would allow that to happen.

Last June, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on International Trade (CIIT) recommended that in the case of Colombia an “impartial human rights impact assessment be carried out by a competent body, which is subject to independent levels of scrutiny and validation.” It further stated that “the recommendations of this assessment should be addressed before Canada considers ratifying and implementing an agreement with Colombia.”

Not only would it be undemocratic to ignore this reasonable recommendation from a parliamentary committee, as your party has already pointed out, but it would be irresponsible considering the ongoing controversy in Colombia.

If, as Prime Minister Harper says, conditions and rights violations have substantially improved in Colombia, then an assessment would make this perfectly clear to the public. We strongly urge leadership from the Liberal party to help postpone the ratification of the Canada-Colombia FTA until such an assessment can be carried out.

Sincerely:

Stephen Lewis, Professor, McMaster University

Maude Barlow, National Chairperson, The Council of Canadians

Ed Broadbent

Sarah Polley, actor / director

Naomi Klein, author, *The Shock Doctrine*

Bruce Cockburn, O.C., musician

Farley & Claire Mowat

Alex Neve, Secretary General, Amnesty International Canada (English Speaking Branch)

Paul Moist, Presidnet, Canadian Union of Public Employees

Béatrice Vaugrante, Directrice générale, Amnistie internationale Canada (Francophone)

Claudette Carbonneau, Présidente de la Confédération des syndicats nationaux (CSN)

Réjean Parent, Président de la Centrale des syndicats du Québec (CSQ)

Khaled Mouammar, National President, Canadian Arab Federation

James Clancy, National President, National Union of Public and General Employees

Judy Rebick, CAW Sam Gindin Chair in Social Justice and Democracy, Ryerson University

Gerry Barr, President-CEO, Canadian Council for International Co-operation

Mary Corkery, Executive Director, KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives

Bruce Cox, Executive Director, Greenpeace Canada

Robert Fox, Executive Director, Oxfam Canada

Very Rev. Bill Phipps, Moderator, United Church of Canada, 1997-2000

The Very Rev. the Hon. Lois M Wilson, CC

Jim Stanford, Economist, Canadian Auto Workers

Tony Clarke, Director, Polaris Institute

Bruce Campbell, Executive Director, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives

Patricia Rebolledo Kloques, Executive Director, Horizons of Friendship

Warren (Smokey) Thomas, President, Ontario Public Service Employees Union

Irene Lanzinger, President, B.C. Teachers' Federation

Sid Ryan, President, CUPE Ontario

Barry O'Neill, President, CUPE B.C.

Darryl Walker, President, B.C. Government and Service Employees' Union

Larry Hubich, President, Saskatchewan Federation of Labour

Pierre Beaudet, Founder, Alternatives

Steven Staples, President of the Rideau Institute, Founder of Ceasefire

Kerry Pither, author, Dark Days

Nancy White, artist

Dr. Denise Nadeau, Interfaith Summer Institute for Justice, Peace and Social Movements,  
Simon Fraser University.

James J. Brittain, Ph.D., Department of Sociology, Acadia University

Jim Sacouman, Ph.D., Department of Sociology, Acadian University

Gordon Laxer, Political Economy Professor, University of Alberta

Fred Judson, Political Science Professor, University of Alberta

David Eggen, Executive Director, Friends of Medicare (Alberta)

Robert Chernomas, Professor of Economics, University of Manitoba

Kim Elliott, Publisher, rabble.ca

Michèle Boisclair, 1ère vice-présidente de la Fédération interprofessionnelle de la santé du Québec – FIQ

François Vaudreuil, Président de la Centrale des syndicats démocratiques (CSD)

Luce Leblanc, 1ère vice-présidente de l'Alliance du personnel professionnel et technique de la santé et des services sociaux (APTS)

Francine Néméh , Directrice du Centre international de solidarité ouvrière (CISO)

Marie-Ève Rancourt, Coord. nationale du Mouvement d'éducation populaire et d'action communautaire du Québec (MÉPACQ)

Pierre-Yves Serinet, Coord. national du Réseau québécois sur l'intégration continentale (RQIC)

Rick Arnold, Common Frontiers

Normand Gilbert, La Table ronde des organismes volontaires d'éducation populaire de l'Estrie (TROVEPE)

Kay Sinclair, Vice-President, Public Service Alliance of Canada B.C.

Ken Neumann, National Director for Canada, United Steelworkers

Dave Coles, President, Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada

Christine Jones, Co-Chair, Canadian Peace Alliance

## **ORGANIZATIONS**

Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario

Grand Council of the Crees (Eeyou Istchee)

Atlantic Regional Solidarity Network

Christian Peacemaker Teams Canada

Développement et Paix

Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec (FTQ)

Projet Accompagnement Solidarité Colombie (PASC)

Regroupement autonome des jeunes (RAJ)

SOS-Colombie

La Chiva Collective

Lawyers Rights Watch Canada

Manitoba Federation of Labour

Rainforest Action Network

Comité pour les droits humains en Amérique latine (CDHAL)

Mennonite Central Committee

Canadian Association of University Teachers

International Civil Liberties Monitoring Group (ICLMG)

CC: Stephen Harper, Prime Minister of Canada

Jack Layton, Leader, New Democratic Party of Canada

Gilles Duceppe, Leader, Bloc Québécois

Elizabeth May, Leader, Green Party of Canada