

Government of Colombia Accepts ILO Sanction

Admits serious situation of freedom of association in Colombia

In order to avoid a debate this year in the ILO Standards Committee the Government of Colombia accepted a sanction consisting of receiving an ILO High Level Tripartite Mission, in this way admitting that the situation of freedom of association in Colombia has not improved.

As is well known, the ILO Standards Committee debates on the labor and trade union situation of 25 countries. The list is defined based on the report of the Commission of Experts and the discussion and negotiation between spokespersons Luc Cortebeek for the workers and Ed Potter for the business sector. Until last Friday Colombia was on the list of 25 countries to be checked on by the Standards Committee this year. However, representatives of the business sector vetoed the case of Colombia and with blackmail "they'll be no list if Colombia is on it", they engineered a final agreement which excluded Colombia from the list and in exchange the government accepted a high level tripartite mission.

The position of the representatives of the business sector against the work of the Committee of Experts, of the doctrine on the right to strike, their refusal to produce an agreement on domestic workers and their veto of the case of Colombia prove that the business sector has joined forces against ILO control. Consequently, the group of workers and, in particular, the ITUC need to evaluate this scenario and design strategies to strengthen the work on the defense of freedom of association in the ILO framework.

With the support of the majority of the group of workers, the CUT, CTC and CPC we held that Colombia should be kept on the list due to the serious violations of labor and trade union rights. In the Plenary of the Standards Committee we unmistakably pointed out that we would not endorse the decision to remove Colombia from the list and in exchange accept a High Level Tripartite Mission. The CGT, through its Secretary General, Julio Roberto Gómez, did not concur with our position and expressed agreement with Colombia's exclusion from the list.

We believe that Colombia on the list is not an end in itself, but the defense of life and respect for labor and trade union rights are a matter of principle; consequently our action has aimed at maintaining a vigilant presence of the international community and ILO.

It is important to clarify that the non-inclusion of a country on the list does not mean recognition by ILO, but the acceptance of a High Level Tripartite Mission on the part of the Colombian government implies that the State accepts it has not complied with ILO requirements in a satisfactory way. Such tripartite missions are used in extremely serious situations, recently in Philippines, Turkey and Guatemala. Therefore, the inaccuracy of the declarations of the government and business sector are surprising because at no point has ILO indicated that the issues of human rights and freedom of association have been solved.

Reality is that the Colombian State has not complied with the observations and recommendations of the ILO organs of control, and this reality does not change because this year Colombia is not on the list of cases of the Standards Committee.

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