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NDP URGES SCHOOL BOARDS TO RETHINK COCA-COLA DEALS

QUEEN'S PARK -- NDP Howard Hampton and NDP Education Critic Rosario Marchese today called on Ontario's learning institutions to support human rights for working people in South America by reconsidering exclusivity contracts with Coca-Cola.

"Workers in Colombia are putting themselves at risk to organize Coca-Cola bottling plants and to have their human rights respected. Ontario school boards, colleges and universities can show solidarity with this struggle by reconsidering exclusivity contracts with Coca-Cola," Hampton said.

Hampton recently met with worker representatives from Colombia. They are trying to unionize the country's Coca-Cola plants. They told the NDP Leader that Coca-Cola's history in Colombia is one of low wages, harsh working conditions and stiff opposition to trade unionists.

"It's a worker's right to form a union – to fight for fair wages, to fight for safe working conditions and to fight for a workplace free from fear and intimidation. I am urging Ontario school boards, college and universities to stand up for working people and reconsider signing exclusivity contracts with Coca-Cola," Hampton said.

Marchese urged Ontario's learning sites to make healthier choices.

"We would like school boards to commit to finding healthier alternatives to Coca-Cola products, while at the same time respecting and promoting human rights in Colombia," said Marchese.

Luis Eduardo Garcia represents SINALTRAINAL, the Colombian Food and Beverage Workers' Union. He says he hopes Canadians will support Colombian workers. "We are reaching out to friends in Canada, those who love and respect life, to support us in this campaign," said Garcia. Six universities in the United States and three in Ireland have rejected the sale of Coca-Cola. In Canada, the University of Guelph Student's Union terminated their exclusivity agreement with Coke.

"Students in campuses across the country are increasingly voicing their concern and opposition to exclusivity contracts with Coke due to human rights abuses and to the dominant presence of multinational corporations in their public space," said Iliam Burbano of the Colombia Action Solidarity Alliance.