

# In Honoring *Killer Coke's* Heyer, UJA-Fed Can't Sink Much Lower

**A**T TONIGHT'S black-tie dinner, the UJA-Federation of New York plans to present its "Global Leadership Award" to Coca-Cola Company President and Chief Operating Officer **Steven J. Heyer**.

Just what kind of global leadership do Coca-Cola and Mr. Heyer stand for? While the UJA-Federation has a well-deserved reputation for promoting charitable and humanitarian ideals, Coca-Cola is increasingly recognized as an outlaw corporation that violates labor rights and human rights in Colombia and around the world.

Since 1989, paramilitary thugs who often work closely with Coca-Cola's local managers in Colombia have killed seven leaders of SINALTRAINAL, the union that represents Coke's bottling plant employees. Dozens of union members have been kidnapped, tortured and harassed. Given the American Jewish community's steadfast support of the right of working people to form and join unions, the idea of honoring Mr. Heyer as a "global leader" borders on the obscene.

In January, New York City Councilmember Hiram Monserrate led a delegation on a 10-day, fact-finding mission to Colombia. In its report, released in April, the delegation said: "(Coca-Cola) has allowed, if not itself orchestrated, the human rights violations of its workers, and it has benefited economically ... (Coke's) continued insistence that it bears no responsibility whatsoever for the terror campaigns against its workers is highly disturbing, as is its complete failure to investigate company ties to the paramilitaries."

Mr. Heyer was recently quoted as saying he feels "privileged to be part of the system," meaning the multinational combination of corporate entities that manufacture, market and distribute Coke products.

In fact, he is not only the No. 2 executive at Coke headquarters in Atlanta; he's also a director of both Coca-Cola Enterprises, the world's largest Coke bottler, and Coca-Cola Femsa, Coke's main



COCA-COLA'S STEVEN J. HEYER

bottler in Latin America and a defendant in the lawsuit in which the International Labor Rights Fund and the United Steelworkers of America, AFL-CIO, document in shocking detail how Coke bottlers "contracted with or otherwise directed paramilitary security forces that utilized extreme violence and murdered, tortured, unlawfully detained or otherwise silenced trade union leaders."

On April 1, 15 members of the U.S. House of Representatives wrote to Mr. Heyer to express their "urgent concern over events at Coca-Cola facilities in Colombia." On April 22, the *Washington Post* reported that one of the main reasons Deval Patrick, Coke's general counsel, suddenly resigned was because higher-ups (or should that be *Heyer-ups*?) wouldn't allow him "to send a contingent of independent observers to inspect plants in Colombia," as Mr. Patrick had promised a group of public-interest lawyers.

The UJA-Federation's insensitive decision to honor Mr. Heyer is completely at odds with its stated mission as an organization that "cares for those in need" and "rescues those in harm's way." And so we ask: *marketing or morality*, which side are you on?

For more information, contact us at:  
(212) 979-8320 / [stopkillercoke@aol.com](mailto:stopkillercoke@aol.com)

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