



Campaign to Stop **Killer Coke**

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Coca-Cola Lies About Providing Security

After months of evasions and stonewalling in response to charges by the Colombian union, SINALTRAINAL, and the International Labor Rights Fund concerning its involvement in gross human rights violations at bottling plants in Colombia, The Coca-Cola Co. is now shamelessly — and falsely — taking credit for providing protective measures to endangered employees in the war-torn country.

Until recently, Coke's reactions to the July 2001 ILRF lawsuit on behalf of the family of Isidro Segundo Gil, a union officer murdered by paramilitaries who were working closely with Coke's managers at a plant in Carepa, Colombia, have either been assertions that there is "no evidence" to support "outrageous allegations" or platitudes about "shar(ing) the aspirations of the people of Colombia for peace, stability and economic progress."

But at least three times in the last month, Coke and its spokesmen have made the same outrageous claims:

- In a statement posted on its corporate web site (www.coca-cola.com) on March 21, Coke said the company "and its local bottling partners have prioritized the safety and security of all employees and labor union officials" by joining "with the Colombian Government and labor unions to provide all employees comprehensive safety and security benefits" such as "transportation, loans for secure housing, paid leave, job transfers, security training, shift and job changes and extensive life insurance" as well as "personal body guards (and) armored vehicles" for union officials.
- In an April 16 article, the day before The Coca-Cola Co. annual meeting, the *Houston Chronicle* quoted Rodrigo Calderon, vice president of public relations for Coca-Cola Latin America in Mexico City: "The allegations (in the ILRF lawsuit) are totally false." The newspaper added: "He said Coca-Cola provides bodyguards to union officials, cell phones, armored vehicles and loans to beef up home security."
- In its April 17 issue, the *Chronicle* reported: "Deval Patrick, Coke's general counsel, said the company has gone as far as providing security for Colombian individuals being threatened."

According to William Mendoza Gomez, president of the Barrancabermeja section of SINALTRAINAL, who attended the Coke stockholders' meeting in Houston, "I'm one of 65 members of SINALTRAINAL who are threatened with death by the paramilitaries. Bodyguards are with me all day, and some nights they stay at my house for increased security. My family has been victimized."

But Mendoza and several other union leaders, including Javier Correa, president of the national union, insist that all protection made available to union members is funded by the Colombian Ministry of the Interior and partially subsidized by the U.S. government and unions in Europe and the U.S.

"Coke has virtually nothing to do with providing or paying for any of the protective measures," Correa said. "We have received some help as a result of the (legal) cases we have brought against the company. In one case, the Ministry of the Interior agreed to provide an armored car but still has not given it, so Panamco (Coca-Cola's "anchor bottler" in Latin America) loaned him one. In another isolated case, a worker was granted permission to take a few days out of the city where he'd received death threats. Coca-Cola wants the world to believe that the things the Ministry of the Interior has provided were given because Coca-Cola asked for them. That is completely false! These are things we have achieved with the CUT (the national union federation) through complaints and requests for protection."

"I am in the program that provides protection for union leaders and human rights defenders," Mendoza said. "This is a program created by the Colombian government, due to pressure from the Interamerican Commission on Human Rights of the OAS. The Commission forced the government to give me protection and this came through the CUT and through Domingo Tovar (of the CUT human rights department), who took the necessary steps to obtain the protection. Coca-Cola doesn't have anything to do with this process."

"Coca-Cola also says they loaned me money to buy the weapon I have," Mendoza added. "This is a lie. I bought the weapon with my own money. I said this directly to the company lawyer (Coke's general counsel, Deval Patrick) at the shareholders' meeting, and told him he shouldn't lie. He said he had received false information from Panamco."