

# COLOMBIA FACT SHEET: Murders of Trade Unionists and Impunity Under Uribe, 2002-2007

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## I. Impunity Continues Unabated

- Since President Uribe took office five years ago, convictions have been reported in 59 trade union homicide cases, an average of less than one per month.<sup>1</sup>
- Of the 59 convictions, only 22 convictions are for the over 400 murders committed since Uribe took office in August 2002.<sup>2</sup>
- In virtually no case has the government convicted the intellectual authors behind those who committed the murders. In the one high-profile case in which the intellectual author was sentenced, the sentencing judge was dismissed.
- Only 55% of those convicted are in custody, according to the Colombian Attorney General's office. The rest are at large.

## II. Number of Convictions Under Uribe, by year of conviction

| Year      | Murders <sup>3</sup> | Convictions     |
|-----------|----------------------|-----------------|
| 1991-2001 | 1727                 | n.a.            |
| 2002      | 186                  | 3               |
| 2003      | 94                   | 4               |
| 2004      | 96                   | 7               |
| 2005      | 70                   | 9               |
| 2006      | 72                   | 10              |
| 2007      | 39                   | 26              |
|           | 2,284                | 59 <sup>4</sup> |

- A \$1.5 million sub-unit assigned to deal with labor cases, including three judges, 13 prosecutors, and 78 investigators was created in 2006. While more resources are being devoted to address impunity, results have been limited: convictions continue to lag behind murders, leaving the impunity rate at over 97%.

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Social Protection (MSP), Government of Colombia document, available from USLEAP.

<sup>2</sup> Between Uribe's inauguration on August 7<sup>th</sup> 2002 and December 31<sup>st</sup> 2007, there were 419 documented cases of trade union murders in Colombia according to the *Escuela Nacional Sindical's* (ENS) records. (The ENS is an independent non-governmental organization in Colombia whose information is frequently cited by the U.S. government and used by the ILO.)

<sup>3</sup> *Escuela Nacional Sindical* for number of murders, 1998-2007. Annual reports, available at [http://ens.org.co/cuadernos.htm?conds\[1\]\[category\].....1\]=003](http://ens.org.co/cuadernos.htm?conds[1][category].....1]=003).

<sup>4</sup> The most recent document available from the government of Colombia, provided in March 2008, lists 68 cases through 2007. Three cases were removed because the conviction occurred prior to the beginning of Uribe's term in office. An additional five cases were removed because the convictions were not for homicide. One additional case was removed because the victim was not a trade unionist. These nine cases have been excluded from this analysis. While an additional four victims have not been confirmed as murdered trade union members by the *Escuela Nacional Sindical*, USLEAP has included them here. USLEAP has also included nine previously undisclosed cases for 2007 that appeared in the document provided in late March by the Colombian government. These cases have not yet been independently vetted with Colombian analysts but are being accepted here, at least for the time being.

#### IV. False Information on Violence Presented by Uribe

- At a press conference on Friday, May 4<sup>th</sup> 2007 in Washington DC, President Uribe told reporters, “*There are no assassinations of workers in Colombia.*”<sup>5</sup>
- On April 19<sup>th</sup> 2007, President Uribe stated to reporters in Colombia that 25 trade unionists had been killed in 2006, in spite of his own government reporting 60 murders and the *Escuela Nacional Sindical* reporting 72.

#### V. Murders of Trade Unionists in Colombia Compared Globally

*Over 60% of trade unionists murdered worldwide in the last four years were from Colombia:*

| <u>Year</u> | <u>Colombia</u> | <u>Rest of World</u> | <u>Total</u>     |
|-------------|-----------------|----------------------|------------------|
| 2006        | 72              | 66                   | 138 <sup>6</sup> |
| 2005        | 70              | 45                   | 115              |
| 2004        | 94              | 51                   | 145              |
| <u>2003</u> | <u>90</u>       | <u>39</u>            | <u>129</u>       |
| Total       | 326             | 201                  | 527              |

#### VI. Change in Forms of Violence

- According to the *Escuela Nacional Sindical*, between 2003 and 2006, “*there was a strategic change in the forms of violence against unionized workers, which can be principally characterized by a decrease in homicides, the accelerated increase in detentions, the increase in violations of the human rights of women unionists, the powerful restrictions to union freedoms, a significant increase in death threats, the increase in crimes committed by State actors, and the use of a variety of strategies to invisibilize the magnitude of the violence.*”<sup>7</sup>

#### VII. Continued Participation of State Forces in Anti-Union Violence

- On June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2007, two Colombian soldiers assassinated Marleny Berrio de Rodriguez, a professor and member of the CUT in San Vicente del Caguán, Caquetá.
- The DAS, Colombia’s FBI, was exposed in 2006 for providing a hit list of 23 trade unionists and others to paramilitaries. Almost every person on the list has since been killed or fled the country.

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<sup>5</sup> “*Colombia's Uribe ends Washington Visit with Fate of Free Trade Agreement Still Uncertain.*”

Associated Press. May 4, 2007. <http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2007/05/04/america/NA-GEN-US-Colombia.php>

<sup>6</sup> International Trade Union Confederation. *Annual Survey of Violations of Trade Union Rights 2007*. Available online at <http://survey07.ituc-csi.org/getcontinent.php?IDContinent=0&IDLing=EN>. Note: The ITUC number given for global trade union murders in 2006 is 144, including 78 for Colombia. The final 2007 worldwide figures are not yet available.

<sup>7</sup> “*Cuaderno de Derechos Humanos No. 19, 2515 Or that Sinister Ease to Forget: 21 Years of Systematic and Selective Assassinations (1986-2006).*” 2007 p 54, <http://www.ens.org.co/publicacion.htm?x=20152686>