

Continue to Support Colombian Social Movements

Conference is appalled that that Colombia continues to be the most dangerous place in the world to be a trade unionist or social movement leader. Since 1986 4,000 trade union leaders have been murdered by paramilitary groups in the country.

Historically Colombia's main engines of economic growth have been extractive in nature - mining and agriculture – and both of these sectors have caused mass displacement of communities and social unrest. Paramilitary groups act aggressively in the interests of elites and multinational corporations, carrying out massacres, killings, forced disappearances, displacements, kidnappings and extortion.

President Santos' administration is keen to project an image of 'progressive government' to the international community and Non Government Organisations, through a series of laws designed to show that problems relating to land are something from the past. Despite this change in discourse, human rights violations continue. The Colombia bulletin for October 2011, published by The International Centre for Trade Union Rights, lists 17 instances of reported violations of trade union rights that have occurred between August and October alone.

UNISON Northern Region has a long history of supporting organisations within Colombia, providing solidarity through delegations and financial assistance.

In August 2011 the Region visited the Corteros in Cauca Valley, South West Colombia. From this came a proposal for UNISON to support a capacity building project working with women across the sugar cane municipalities in Valle del Cauca through an educational diploma. This will enable them to empower themselves and their communities.

The Region has also facilitated a number public meetings and events in Newcastle to raise awareness. In particular, the Better Way Forum provided a weekend of discussion on global austerity issues, attended by trade union representatives from South America and Europe.

Conference agrees to:

1. Highlight the continuation of violence against trade union and social movement leaders in Colombia;
2. Encourage regions and branches to link with organisations such as Justice for Colombia and the Colombian Solidarity Campaign to help develop relationships with trade union organisations in Colombia; and
3. To develop these links with a view to providing practical support and solidarity through delegations