



10 October 2013

New attacks and death threats against union members in Guatemala

The global union federation Public Services International is calling on Guatemala's President to take urgent action to protect trade unionists, in response to what appear to be coordinated attacks on PSI affiliate members this week. PSI is further calling on trade unions around the world to lobby their national governments to withdraw from any trade deals with Guatemala until the escalating reign of terror marked by the murders and intimidation of union members is ended. Workers who expose cases of corruption by elected and military officials, or simply advocate for their legal rights to fair wages and working conditions are being systematically targeted.

The National Health Workers' Union of Guatemala (SNTSG) has reported this new series of attacks:

On 2 October 2013 at 3 pm, Melvy Lizeth Camey Rojas, the Secretary of SNTSG Health Center of Chiquimulilla in the Department of Santa Rosa, was in fear of her life for the second time, when gunmen on a motorcycle came looking for her at her workplace. According to witnesses, these people shared similarities with the assassins who killed SNTSG Labour Advisor Ricardo Morataya Lemus and seriously wounded Rojas in a previous attack in July 2012.

On 6 October at 8 am, Genaro Cruz Telón of Chinebal in the Izabal region, former secretary and member of the SNTSG, was gravely wounded in an attack, and is now in a coma. A man has been charged in the incident.

Also on 6 October, Mauricia Garcia Ruiz, General Secretary at the Children's Hospital for Infectious Disease and Rehabilitation in Guatemala City, received a death threat.

On 7 October the Organizing Secretary of the Executive Committee of the SNTSG, Dora Regina Ruano, received death threats against herself and her children, via telephone.

These attacks and threats follow on the cases of 58 trade unionists murdered in recent years in Guatemala. Three public service union workers were killed in separate incidents in March of this year alone – SNTSG members Carlos Hernandez and Santa Alvarado, and Kyra Zulueta Enríquez Mena of the Union of the Municipality of Nueva Concepción. Not one person has yet been sentenced in connection with any of these outstanding murder cases. It is especially worrying that these most recent attacks are primarily targeting women who are activists.

Emphasizing what she told Guatemala's President, Labour, Health and Interior Ministers in a face-to-face meeting in August, PSI leader Rosa Pavanelli says that, "Defending the rights of our affiliate trade union members in Guatemala is our top priority – and it will remain so until the situation for workers in this country improves. The criminalization of social conflicts and blacklisting of union activists must end. We ask for your government's commitment to engage in meaningful collective bargaining in the public sector as an essential step in this process. We demand respect for the right to life, the recognition that there is an anti-union campaign in this country, and that there must be an end to impunity."

END

media release... communiqué de presse... comunicado de prensa...