ILRF Welcomes Investigation of Drummond for Paramilitary Links

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Concerns raised about safety of key witness in Drummond trial

The International Labor Rights Fund (ILRF) welcomes the announcement that law enforcement officials in Colombia will investigate the murder of three trade union leaders working at a coal mine owned by US-based Drummond after allegations that company officials paid right-wing paramilitaries to conduct the assassinations.

ILRF and the United Steelworkers have been representing the SINTRAMIENERGETICA union in a lawsuit against Drummond Coal’s subsidiary, Drummond Ltd., which was filed in March 2002. On March 5, 2007, the judge ruled that the case will go to trial on civil claims against Drummond Ltd. and the Colombian president of the company, Augusto Jimenez.

One of the witnesses in the case, Rafael Garcia, is in crucial need of protection. Garcia, a former high-level intelligence official, submitted testimony saying that he has important evidence linking Drummond officials to paramilitaries. While currently serving a sentence in jail, Garcia is still at enormous risk and his petitions to be placed in a witness protection program have been denied.

Bama Athreya, Executive Director of the ILRF, said today, “We are extremely worried about Garcia’s safety as he is probably the most endangered person in Colombia. Garcia’s safety is essential to exposing the truth in the Drummond case and bringing justice to the families of the murdered Drummond union leaders.”

Both the Colombian government announcement and the new rulings in the Drummond case have come at a time of increasing scrutiny of collaboration between paramilitaries, government officials and multinational corporations. Chiquita Banana announced last week they would pay a $25 million fine for dealing with paramilitary groups in Colombia which are listed on the US State Department’s terrorist list.

Meanwhile, in the US, Congress is debating labor provisions in the proposed text of a US-Colombia Free Trade Agreement and President Bush recently returned from a trip to Colombia.

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