NESTLE SUED IN U.S. FOR COMPLICITY IN MURDER OF COLOMBIAN UNION LEADER

Wife Claims Food & Beverage Giant Retaliated for Husband’s Exposure of Company’s Use of Expired Milk in Popular Drink

LABOR WATCHDOG GROUP MAY ASK MAJOR USERS OF DEER PARK BRAND NOT TO RENEW CONTRACTS

Nestle, the world’s largest food and beverage company, has been sued for complicity in the murder of a Colombian trade union leader by paramilitary forces with which the company has had a long-standing relationship.

The suit was filed in U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Florida by the Washington, DC-based International Labor Rights Fund (ILRF) and the Florida-based law firm of Conrad & Scherer, LLP on behalf of the wife of the slain unionist and his labor union, SINALTRAINAL.

Gladys Francisca Mendoza Mejia claims that her husband, Luciano Enrique Romero Molina, was killed by paramilitaries associated with Las Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC) in retaliation for his discovery and exposure of Nestle’s use of expired milk in its popular Milo brand drink. A group of Colombian senators confirmed the validity of this claim in a report issued on November 22, 2002. Molina was one of several SINALTRAINAL trade union leaders assassinated by AUC gunmen in the wake of the expired milk scandal.

ILRF sued Nestle under two U.S. laws, the Alien Tort Statute and the Torture Victim Protection Act, as well as Florida state tort law. ILRF has been in the forefront of efforts to combat serious human rights abuses through the use of these laws. Last year it won a settlement from Unocal on behalf of Burmese plaintiffs who had sued the Los Angeles-based natural gas exploration company for using forced labor in the construction of a pipeline through Burma.

ILRF is in discussions with allied organizations in the U.S. about the possibility of launching a campaign targeting Nestle’s Deer Park brand in connection with the parent company’s human rights abuses abroad. Many universities have contracts with the bottled water company that will be up for renewal over the next several years. The campaign would be similar to a three-year old effort on many college campuses focused on Coca Cola for alleged complicity in the murders of trade union leaders by Colombian paramilitary death squads.

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