

# THE GRIM TRUTH ABOUT REPRESENTATIVE GRIMM'S COLOMBIA FREE TRADE VOTE



At least 51 trade unionists were murdered in Colombia in 2010 and 2,860 have been killed since 1986. Death squads also target indigenous and Afro-Colombian leaders, political reformers, leaders of community organizations, peasant farmers, environmental advocates – and children. Assassinations are usually carried out by right-wing paramilitary groups allied with the Colombian government and by government security forces.

Over the objections of human rights activists, environmentalists, labor unions, AIDS activists, anti-hunger activists, animal welfare advocates, and indigenous rights activists, Staten Island's Congressman Michael Grimm voted for the US-Colombia Free Trade Agreement (FTA) on October 12th. Human rights advocates consider Colombia to be the nation with the worst human rights record in the Western hemisphere. In voting for the trade agreement, Grimm chose to ignore:

- the 5.2 million displaced people forced from their homes, disproportionately Afro-Colombian and indigenous people;
- the systematic extermination of the Colombian labor movement, with roughly 51 union members murdered in 2010, several attempted murders, hundreds of death threats, and a routine and systematic failure of the government to guarantee the exercise of fundamental labor rights;
- purportedly demobilized paramilitaries resurfacing with new names and intimidating those in the act of defending human rights;
- increased extrajudicial executions of civilians by members of the Colombian armed forces.
- the 104 assassinations of civilians by Colombian government security forces and paramilitaries in the first 10 months of new President Juan Miguel Santos' term.



Uncovering the bodies of assassination victims. Colombian soldiers are rewarded for the total number of left-wing guerillas they kill. In order to inflate kill numbers and reap reward, soldiers killed an estimated 3,000 civilians, dressed them as guerillas, photographed them, and buried them in mass graves. As head of the military, President Santos helped to cover up this ongoing atrocity.

People all over the world are calling for international trade and investment systems that respect and promote the dignity of the human person, ensure the development and well-being of people in all nations, foster gender and racial equity and lead to environmental sustainability. Approving the FTA in a country engaged in a five decade conflict will perpetuate these abuses and exacerbate the humanitarian crisis lived out every day. Once implemented the agreement will:

- **Undermine human rights and fuel the fires of conflict.** Colombia is still a country at war. Its record on human rights is dismal. Attacks on civil society, union leaders, Afro-Colombians and Indigenous people continue with impunity. The FTA will deepen the economic disparity, which is a root cause of the conflict, and diminish human rights.
- **Destroy small farmers.** The agreement will favor only a small sector of Colombian farmers who export to the U.S. The Colombian

Ministry of Agriculture estimates that if tariffs on agricultural imports from the U.S. were eliminated, immediately, overall income for farmers would drop by more than fifty percent. This would wipe out local farmers-as happened to the 2 million who have been displaced in Mexico since NAFTA passed 17 years ago. This will only add to Colombia's 5.2 million internally displaced people.

- **Increase drug trafficking.** Colombia is already the world's largest producer of cocaine. The FTA will threaten livelihoods and displace small farmers leaving, for some, no other alternative than to join the drug trade. [its not all that lucrative for the small farmers, the traffickers are the big winners.
- **Harm Indigenous peoples and Afro-Colombians.** The internal conflict has disproportionately displaced Afro-Colombian and Indigenous peoples from their resource-rich, ancestral territories, ignoring their constitutional and legal rights. Laws put in place in anticipation of the FTA to attract investment dismantle the legal rights related to territory, mineral and forest resources of these communities. Once the FTA is in place, under its investment rules, multinational corporations benefiting from these legal reforms will be able to sue the Colombian government for compensation for future lost profits if the laws are revoked.
- **Hinder access to life-saving medicines.** While the amended text of the Colombia FTA removes the most egregious, Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) based, provisions limiting the access to affordable medicines, it still includes North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) provisions that undermine the right to affordable medicines. This will further exacerbate a failing system in Colombia that only covers ten percent of Afro-Colombians.
- **Harm workers and environment.** Colombia is the most dangerous country in the world for union and labor organizers. There is little that the labor chapter can do to address the continued violence and impunity in the country. Moreover, the government has demonstrated little will to promote the labor laws and policies that are necessary for the full exercise of the international core labor rights.
- **Increase the burden on women, children, and the poor.** Provisions promoting the privatization and deregulation of essential services such as water, healthcare and education are written into this trade agreement. As these services become less accessible, women and the poor would have to suffer the consequences of increases in prices of these services.
- **Undermine U.S. and Colombian sovereignty.** The Colombia FTA contains a NAFTA-style foreign investor chapter that allows corporations to sue governments that pass environmental and public health laws that might reduce corporate profits.
- **Threaten the Amazon and wildlife.** The FTA will stimulate an increase in logging and other extraction projects in the Colombian Amazon rain forest that mostly reside in Afro-Colombian and Indigenous territories. This will further endanger the lungs of the globe and precious species and will be reinforced by investor rules that allow corporations to sue the Colombian government when enforcement of environmental laws results in lost corporate profits.
- **Pirate traditional knowledge.** The FTA will pave the way for large pharmaceutical and agribusiness corporations to patent traditional knowledge, seeds, and life forms. This opens the door to bio-piracy of the Andean-Amazon region and threatens the ecological, medicinal and cultural heritage of Afro-Colombians and Indigenous peoples.
- **Hurt the US Economy** While the trade agreement will benefit corporations that wish to outsource jobs to sweatshops in a country where they can get away with killing labor organizers, the trade agreement will be terrible for US workers and the economy overall. According to the Economic Policy the Colombia FTA will boost the U.S. trade deficit by \$2.9 billion over the next seven years. This rise in the trade deficit, in turn, would cost the U.S. economy about 55,000 net jobs.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

\* Contact Representative Grimm and let him know that you are outraged that he voted for a job-killing free trade agreement that will exacerbate human rights atrocities and environmental destruction in Colombia: Representative Michael Grimm, 512 Cannon HOB Washington, DC 20515 Phone: (202) 225-3371 Fax: (202) 226-1272

\* Contact TradeJustice NY Metro to learn more and to find out additional ways that you can help fight for a fairer international trade policies. Phone: (718) 218-4523 Fax: (501) 633-3476 Email: [info@tradejustice.net](mailto:info@tradejustice.net) Web: [www.tradejustice.net](http://www.tradejustice.net)

*Endorsed by Occupy Wall Street Trade Justice, Arts and Culture, Direct Action, and Environmental Solidarity Working Groups; in association with All Souls Bethlehem Church; American Jobs Alliance; Global Justice for Animals and the Environment; Jose Schiffino (Chair, NY Labor Coalition for Latin American Advancement Fair Trade Committee.); Latin American and Caribbean Community Center; NY Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador; NYC School of the Americas Watch; Reform Party of NJ; Mingas NY; Penley Global Law; Queerocracy; and TradeJustice New York Metro.*