

TRADEJUSTICE

New York Metro

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MEDIA ADVISORY

TradeJustice Activists Protest Colombia NAFTA Expansion as Death Squad-Linked Colombian President Speaks at Waldorf Astoria Reception

WHO: Tradejustice New York Metro, Communer@s, Wetlands Activism Collective/Global Justice for Animals and the Environment, Movement for Peace in Colombia, and others.

WHAT: Trade justice activists will protest Colombian president Alvaro Uribe 's support for a NAFTA-style free trade agreement between the US and Colombia and his complicity in paramilitary death squad terrorism

WHEN: Wednesday, September 24th, 12:30PM.

WHERE: 301 Park Avenue between 49th and 50th Streets.

WHY: The Colombia Free Trade Agreement is universally condemned by human rights, labor, environmental, family farm, indigenous rights, animal rights, and health care access groups.

The agreement will allow US agribusiness to dump genetically engineered, industrially produced, factory farmed, government subsidized crops and animal products onto Colombia's market, displacing family farmers and driving them to coca production for the global cocaine trade. This will fuel US aerial fumigation programs that have poisoned people, wildlife, and the Amazon rainforest.

State-investor provisions in the agreement give corporations the right to sue the US and Colombian governments for unlimited sums in international tribunals for enforcing their environmental and labor laws, despite Colombia's abysmal record on these issues. Colombia has the highest rate of unionist assassinations on the planet, the work of right-wing paramilitary death squads with close ties to the Uribe administration. Despite Uribe's rhetoric of ending impunity towards unionist killings, there have been more killings so far this year than in all of last year.

Colombia's Amazon rainforests and Andean cloudforests have been subject to exploitation by oil corporations, spilling vast amounts of oil into the sensitive Amazon rainforest, creating a conflict flashpoint for the decades long Colombian civil war, and leading to the displacement of Colombia's indigenous communities.

Colombia has the 2nd highest rate of internal displacement on the planet after the Sudan, the result of mass-displacement of Afro-Colombian communities, as terror groups seize lands for lucrative oil palm plantations for the biofuels market. The free trade agreement encourages corporate investment in projects like biofuels, while allowing corporations to circumvent environmental laws through the state-investor provisions.

Intellectual property rules in the agreement will allow corporations to enforce patent protections that will limit access to generic drugs while maintaining prices on brand name drugs that will make the Colombian poor unable to afford life-saving medications.

Free trade agreements have failed to deliver their promised benefits, contributing instead to an increasing concentration of wealth while contributing to unemployment and lower wages for family farmers and working people. A majority of Republican and Democratic voters now oppose NAFTA-style policies. President Uribe is aggressively lobbying the US Congress to pass a free trade agreement in December, when voters will no longer have the power to hold the outgoing Congress accountable for their votes on an unpopular trade agreement.

Uribe's closest allies are implicated in the "Parauribismo" (Uribe paramilitary) scandal, with over 62 members of Congress official suspects. 33 elected officials, including Mario Uribe Escobar, President Uribe's cousin and former President of Congress, were in jail awaiting trial. The scandal revealed close ties between government officials and the right-wing AUC, including accusations that Uribe helped plan a paramilitary massacre in 1997, charges Uribe denies.