To all affiliated national and regional organisations
To Global Unions and all the Global Union Federations
To all sister trade union organisations

Brussels, 20 September 2006

Dear colleagues,

This letter is a follow-up to a letter sent by the Colombian united trade union front (CUT-CGT-CTC-CPC) that you may have received recently. That letter called for a national and international mobilisation on 26 September as part of the joint campaign we are waging with the ICFTU, the ETUC and the WCL on human and trade union rights in Colombia.

You will probably recall that on 1 June 2006, at the ILO headquarters in Geneva, the three Colombian trade union centres (CUT-CGT-CTC) signed a “Tripartite Agreement on Freedom of Association and Democracy” with the Colombian government and employers’ delegations.

The key point in that agreement was the establishment in Colombia of an “Permanent ILO Representation” charged with prioritising concerted approaches, social dialogue, collective bargaining, freedom of association, protection of workers’ human rights, and freedom of association and action for employers.

As yet that Agreement has not been implemented. Despite the insistence of the Colombian trade union centres, so far the actual results have been very limited. Though a forum for social dialogue has been re-established (to some extent), the permanent representation of the ILO, which was the key aspect of the June agreement has so far not materialised. An international delegation visiting Bogotá in August for the CBT congress noted this and expressed its support for the speedy establishment of the ILO permanent representation in a statement (see attached note). Just yesterday, when meeting the Vice-President of Colombia in Brussels with a Belgian trade union delegation, we noted the same situation. The Vice-President promised to make some concrete progress and we stressed that this should be done quickly.

In addition to that, human rights violations have been continuing together with the impunity associated with it. There have been a series of new violations of human and workers’ rights. Some union leaders have lost their lives, whilst others have been threatened or unfairly arrested. Similarly, various events have highlighted the persistence of neo-liberal policies that sideline trade union objections, such as the closure of ADPOSTAL, threats to close down the ISS – the Social Security Institute - and new steps towards privatising ECOPETROL, accompanied by persistent abuse of the trade union rights of workers belonging to the trade union in that company, USO (Unión sindical obrera).
For all those reasons, and bearing in mind that the situation of Colombian workers is still one of the worst in the world, we are calling on all the member organisations of the ICFTU, the ETUC and the WCL as well as fraternal organisations to engage in solidarity action with Colombian workers on 26 September. That date has been chosen by the trade union front to demand the full implementation of the Tripartite Agreement. More specifically we are calling for:

❖ The speedy establishment of an ILO permanent representation in Colombia, starting with the nomination by the ILO Director-General of a high-level Permanent Representative who enjoys the confidence of all the interested parties – the government, the employers and workers – and of the international community.
❖ The establishment of standing bodies for social dialogue, respect of the agreements reached by those bodies and, to that end, the establishment of an appropriate climate, which in turn requires respect of ILO conventions in all policies promoted by the Colombian government;
❖ The ending of all violence against workers and trade unionists, the ending of impunity and strict compliance with the recommendations of the special group of enquiry established by the Attorney-General to identify and punish the perpetrators of crimes against the lives and freedom of trade union leaders and workers;
❖ The ending of the closure or restructuring of public enterprises until such time as a genuine process of consultation with trade union organisations has been established involving respect of their views and of the rights of workers guaranteed in the ILO conventions that Colombia has ratified.

The action can take the form of meetings with the diplomatic authorities of Colombia in your respective countries, demonstrations in front of those missions or other relevant actions. It is important that you inform the media about your action. You may also wish to send protest letters to the President of Colombia: Lic. Alvaro Uribe Vélez; President of the Republic of Colombia; Casa de Nariño, Bogotá, Colombia; FAX: + 57.1.566.20.71.

Following the special day on 26 September, the international organisations (ICFTU, WCL and ETUC) will continue their solidarity action in support of the workers of Colombia, in line with the decision of the 3rd EU-Latin America/Caribbean Trade Union Summit in Vienna in April 2006 (see attachment).

In the hope that there will be many actions on 26 September, please receive our warmest greetings,

John Monks
Secretary General ETUC

Guy Ryder
Secretary General ICFTU

Willy Thys
Secretary General WCL

Víctor Báez
Secretary General ICFTU-ORIT

Eduardo Garcia
Secretary General CLAT

Annexes:
?? Statement by the international delegations in Bogotá on 25 August 2006
?? Excerpt from the Statement of the 3rd EU-Latin America/Caribbean Trade Union Summit EU-Latin America and Caribbean Trade Union Summit