

19 November 2004

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Assassination of US trade union leader in El Salvador

As you may be aware Gilberto Soto, an organiser of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters in the United States was murdered on a visit to his home country El Salvador on 5 November 2004. The circumstances of his murder indicate that this was not an attempt to rob Mr Soto, but that the sole intent of the attack was to kill him.

Gilberto Soto was involved in an organising campaign among port drivers for Maersk in Miami. He had planned to meet with his fellow Central American workers in the trucking and port industries during his trip. More information is available on his murder on the ITF web site: <http://www.itf.org.uk/english/newsonline/november/soto.htm>

We have been concerned by recent statements made in the Salvordorean press by the Minister of the Interior Rene Figueroa and the Director of the National Civil Police Ricardo Menesses which have dismissed any suggestion that his assassination may be linked to his trade union activities as being part of a campaign to disrupt the signing of a new Free Trade Agreement with the United States. They have suggested that his death was probably the result of a common crime or a family quarrel.

I attach for you the letter of concern that we have written to President Elias Antonio Saca Gonzalez of El Salvador, which condemns the statements made by the Minister of Interior and police chief calls for a full and transparent investigation calls for full protection to be given to witnesses demands the protection of basic union rights in El Salvador.

We wish to request that your union send a similar letter to him based on these demands. Please send this letter within the next five days by November 24.

Yours fraternally

David Cockroft  
General Secretary

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President Elias Antonio Saca Gonzalez  
Casa Presidencial  
San Salvador

Via fax/1 page +1-503-281-0018

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Your Excellency

Assassination of US trade union in El Salvador

I am writing on behalf of the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF), a global trade union organisation representing 624 transport unions in 142 countries.

According to information received via the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, which is an affiliate of the ITF, Mr Gilberto Soto - a US citizen and trade union leader - was brutally assassinated in the province of Usulután, El Salvador on the evening of Friday, 5 November 2004.

Mr Soto, who was born in El Salvador, was a longstanding union organiser with the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, and was working on a project promoting the basic trade union rights of port drivers in coordination with the Danish labour union Specialarbejderforbundet i Danmark and the International Transport Workers Federation. Mr. Soto had planned to meet with his fellow Central American workers in the trucking and port industries during his visit to El Salvador.

It is, of course, the responsibility of the authorities in El Salvador to conduct a thorough investigation of this heinous murder and to bring the perpetrators to justice. We have been deeply disturbed, however, to see a recent report in *Diario de Hoy* in which Interior Minister René Figueroa and the Director of the National Civil Police (PNC), Ricardo Meneses have been making statements declaring that the motive for the murder is probably common street crime or a family quarrel and dismissing any suggestion of other possible motives as being part of a political agenda. It appears, therefore, that Mr Figueroa has already decided that certain lines of investigation such as those relating Mr Soto's killing to his trade union activities will not be followed.

We find such a prejudgement of the outcome of an ongoing police investigation from the senior government minister concerned and from the head of the police force extraordinary and deeply undermining of our confidence in the integrity of the police investigation.

We should like an assurance that all lines of enquiry will be followed; that there will be a transparent and efficient investigation and that Minister Figueroa will cease from trying to influence the outcome of the police investigation. We would also call upon your government to provide full protection for witnesses and for other members of Mr Soto's family during this investigation.

We would urge your government to ensure that all trade union leaders and activists and the NGOs which assist the defence of basic human rights in El Salvador are fully protected in their legitimate trade union activities.

Yours sincerely

David Cockcroft  
General Secretary