



CUPE Internationalist

International Solidarity Committee Newsletter • May 2010

Message from CUPE Ontario's International Solidarity Committee

Since the devastating January 12th earthquake in Haiti, a priority for CUPE Ontario's International Solidarity Committee has been various Haiti-specific initiatives. These efforts have included, working with the CUPE Ontario Division to issue a solidarity statement and urgent appeal for humanitarian aid; a March 26th event co-organized with CUPE Ontario's Racial Justice Committee that raised more than \$7,000.00 for "Partners in Health" (<http://www.pih.org/home.html>); and support for a cross-Canada solidarity tour by Dukens Raphael, secretary-general of the Haitian Confederation of Public and Private Sector Workers (see last article in newsletter for details on tour).

In addition to Haiti-specific work, the Committee has actively supported the national campaign to stop the ratification of the proposed Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement-CCFTA (Bill C-2). This organizing has focused mainly on public actions targeting key Toronto area Liberal MP's (especially Bob Rae and Mario Silva) that have allied themselves with the Harper Conservatives in order to try to ratify the CCFTA. This fight continues as Bill C-2

In October 2009, our committee supported the first annual "Congo Solidarity Week" held at the University of Toronto to highlight the devastating human rights catastrophe and corporate pillaging of natural resources taking place in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). In the coming months, the global impact of Canadian mining companies will become an important focus of our committee's organizing and educational work.

Please contact us if you're local is interested in an educational session on the following topics:

- Impacts of Canada-Colombia FTA.
- Human rights crisis in Sri Lanka.
- Canadian mining pillaging in the DRC and Latin America.
- Resolution# 50 and the Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) Movement.
- Importance of international solidarity work to union organizing.

Ilian Burbano email: cca_toronto@hotmail.com

Chair CUPE Ontario International Solidarity Committee & Local 3393

International Solidarity Committee Members include:

Suby Kerr (local 4400) - Edgar Godoy (local 2191) - Logan Sellathurai (local One) – Bodia Macharia (local 3902).

Sri Lanka – ‘Post Conflict’ and the Freedom of Media
by Logan Sellathurai (local One)—email: justice5@sympatico.ca

“In Sri Lanka the opportunity for peace and reconciliation continues to be marred by the treatment of journalists, human rights defenders and other critics of the Government” – (UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on March 4, 2010 in Geneva.)

Since ‘independence’ from British Colonialism in 1948, Sri Lanka’s past six decades have been marked with continued deterioration of democracy and the threat to rule of law and human rights, majoritarian hegemony over minorities, rapidly increasing attacks on freedom of speech and media, abduction and involuntary disappearances, extrajudicial killings, political favoritism and political victimization; all these have become unchallenged norms of today’s Sri Lanka society.

Also, post colonial Sri Lanka has witnessed three major armed rebellions of the youths – two by the Sinhalese youth of the south. The third and prolonged one from the Tamil youth of the north, which span a period of two and a half decades, was brutally crushed in May 2009 resulting in tremendous war crimes committed and no investigation on war crimes summoned to date. As Brad Adams, Asia Director of the ‘Human Rights Watch’ pointed out on May 7, 2010, *“Every time the international community raises the issue of accountability, Sri Lanka establishes a commission that takes a long time to achieve nothing. Ban should put an end to this game of smoke and mirrors and begin a process that would ensure justice for all the victims of Sri Lanka’s war.”*

Media Freedom: Since 2005, when the current president took office, attacks on journalists and media institutions and raids and forced closure of media offices have rapidly increased. Over 20 media workers including journalists were abducted and killed. There were hundreds of attacks on media institutions where in some cases; powerful personalities such as cabinet ministers very close to President were physically present. The agony is that they are still holding cabinet portfolios including the media portfolio.

In January 8th 2009, the cold-blooded murder of well-known journalist Lasantha Wickrematunge in broad day light, and the sentencing of journalist J.S. Tissanayagam to 20 years hard labour for writing two articles about the sufferings of the Tamil people during the war; stand as undeniable evidence of the burial of media-freedom in Sri Lanka. In his powerful last editorial Lasantha said *“When finally I am killed, it will be the government that kills me.”*

Currently over 50 journalists are in exile in order to protect their lives from abduction and involuntary disappearances.

Prageeth Ekneligoda, a journalist was disappeared on January 24, 2010, two days before the presidential election. More than a hundred days passed after his disappearance, his whereabouts remain unknown and the police have so far failed to make any inquiry findings to the public. His disappearance occurred shortly after he wrote two articles supporting the opposition candidate of the presidential election.

Prageeth was a previous victim of an unresolved abduction. On August 27, 2009, he was taken away, blindfolded, and then chained in a cell by two men who were acting on the instructions from someone referred as a “high officer”. Prageeth was released when the two men were told by the “higher officer” that he was not the right target.

On November 03, 2009, Prageeth in his letter to a young family friend of him stated “*I know that killing me, being a patient and physically weak to the lowest level, is easier than killing an ant. But just because of that, I cannot support building a cruel autocratic state. I cannot support killing thousands, including infants and elderly, humiliating them, imprisoning them and grabbing their property and land. I cannot be a wise man who pretends not to see these actions*”.

In conclusion, as a trade union activist, I urge you all “Stand in solidarity with Sri Lankan journalists who are courageously reporting and advocating for human rights”.

**The US Military Bases In Colombia, New Military
Strategy for Latin America**
by Edgar S. Godoy (local 2191)—email: g.edgarsaul@gmail.com

In September of 2009, when the U.S. military base in Manta Ecuador was closed, social organizations in Ecuador, the activists and peace loving people took to the street to celebrate their victory. “Hands Off Ecuador!!! Hands Off Latin America and the Caribbean!!!”, the people chanted, time and time again. Similar actions were taken by the Paraguayan government who refused to cooperate with USA regarding military bases in Paraguay. In addition, increased pressures have been applied by social and political organizations and ordinary citizens for the closure of the School of the Americas in Panama.

However, while the Pentagon was closing these military bases their military strategy was to move their bases to Colombia. As a result, an agreement was signed on October 30, 2009 between Colombia and the United States for the establishment of seven new U.S. military bases on Colombian territory. This military retreat clearly represents an

affront to the peace loving people in Colombia. It is also a strong indication that the U.S.A is not interested in a politically negotiated solution to the armed conflict in Colombia. Contrary to the “rhetoric of Change” from President Obama, this new militarization of Colombia will contribute to deepen the social, economic and political problems in that country.

Historically, the U.S. military bases in Latin America and the Caribbean have always been associated with bloody coups and dictatorships. In the Colombian case, these have been associated to paramilitary death squads. They are also closely linked with serious human rights violations such as disappearances, force displacement of indigenous and Afro-Colombians as well as killings. Currently, Plan Colombia, the agreement between the U.S. and Colombia, supposedly for drug eradication has been responsible for innumerable human rights violations including widespread and systematic killings of civilians by the Colombian military and paramilitaries.

The October 30 agreement to install seven new military bases in Colombia is expressly prohibited by the country's constitution, as pointed out by Colombian Senator Jorge Robledo. Senator Robledo also points out that the bases, *"can only bring problems to the country due to the serious violation of sovereignty and self-determination in the political, economic and social spheres; it subjugates the nation in the worst way to the horrors of war and the interests of the superpower, pitting neighbouring countries against one another and discredits it more in the eyes of the world's democrats"*.

This new aggressive United States presence in Colombia means 34 operations with military contractors, called "lily pads." Senator Robledo explained: "It should be pointed out that among the new strategies for global domination by the biggest empire in history is the use of military bases called 'lily pads,' which can be relatively small because they are designed to be expanded or for troops to jump from one to the other".

The U.S. political goals for the region and the peoples' rejection of those goals, the bases in Colombia can only be seen as a weapon raised against the people of Colombia -- already being brutally suppressed by U.S.-trained armed gangs – as well as the peoples of Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador and throughout all of Latin America.

Say No To Canadian Troops For Congo and Yes To Canadian Diplomacy
by Bodia Macharia (local 3902) and president Friends of Congo, University of Toronto
email: bodia.bavuidi@gmail.com

As Canada's Governor-General Michaëlle Jean visits the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), much speculation abounds regarding the new-found attention being paid to the DRC by the Canadian government. It appears that Canadian General Andrew Leslie is

primed to head the 20,000 strong United Nations Mission in the Congo. There is speculation that the anticipated Canadian troops withdrawal from Afghanistan may result in Canadian troops presence in Congo.

Canadian troops should stay home. The DRC does not need more militarization, it needs justice. Canada can help to advance justice, peace and stability in the Congo without sending a single soldier. Should the Canadian government and people in general do the following, it would go further to advance peace and stability in the Congo more than any number of Canadian troops:

1. Call on the United States and England in particular as well as other nations throughout the globe to make Congo a top diplomatic priority.
2. Call on the United States and England to pressure their allies Rwanda and Uganda to cease the destabilization of the Congo, open political space in their own countries and engage in sincere and earnest dialogue with their countrymen who are wreaking havoc in the Congo.
3. Canada should also leverage its position with Rwanda to open political space inside Rwanda and engage in dialogue with Rwandan rebel groups inside Congo.
4. Canada should call on its corporations and those raising capital on the Toronto Stock Exchange (an estimated half the mining capital in the world is raised on the Toronto Stock Exchange) to cease their exploitation of Congo's riches. Companies such as Banro, First Quantum, Anvil Mining, Barrick Gold via its partner Anglo-Gold Ashanti and others have or continue to benefit at the expense of the Congolese people. A good start would be for the Parliament to pass Bill C-300. In addition, assure that the Canadian Investment Fund for Africa is used for its original purpose - African companies, not Canadian companies that have ready access to capital markets.
5. Provide support to local institutions as opposed to authoritarian regimes (Rwanda and Uganda for example) that oppress their populations with the support of Canadian tax dollars.

For more information see Friends of the Congo: <http://www.friendsofthecongo.org>

Worker-to-Worker Solidarity in Response to Haitian Earthquake

by Ilian Burbano (local 3393)

***"We're looking for solidarity. Charity we're not interested in." – Dukens Raphael,
Secretary-General of Haiti's Confederation of Public and Private Sector Workers***

The start of 2010 was marked by the devastating January 12th earthquake in Haiti which resulted in 300,000 deaths, close to 2 million homeless and 75% to 80% of the electricity and telecommunications infrastructure in the capital Port au Prince destroyed. Over 80% of schools have been destroyed. Potable water has not been reestablished in most areas affected by the earthquakes. Furthermore, the enormous homeless and internally displaced population is at serious risk due to the incoming rainy season and the lack of

adequate shelter.

CUPE members were privileged to receive first-hand testimony of this crisis when Brother Dukens Raphael, Secretary-General of Haiti's Confederation of Public and Private Sector Workers (CTSP), visited Canada in April 2010. Raphael was the international guest speaker at CUPE B.C.'s 47th annual convention and then had a chance to meet union activists and address public meetings in Toronto, Montreal and Ottawa. This was his first Canadian visit outside of Quebec and a great opportunity to establish wider trade union links.

Despite the devastating impact of the earthquake on his own confederation [i.e., 300 of his members were killed, 40 union families left homeless and his union office was completely destroyed], Raphael focused on the broader needs of Haitian society: ***"We must rebuild Haiti. But it must be done in a way that meets the needs of workers and the common people. Strong and effective public services are vital for Haiti's future. Our unions have been fighting for this for years and resisting privatization of our national assets."***

Raphael was critical of the international aid effort which focused on providing financial and humanitarian assistance to western NGO's, instead of grassroots social movement organizations including unions. He also criticized the "militarization" of the relief effort which at one point saw at least 20,000 US troops on the ground. Finally, he cautioned Canadian audiences that any successful reconstruction effort in Haiti would have to involve the full participation and be lead by the Haitian people who need to 'rebuild' their country—both materially and politically after a long history of exploitation and the undermining of democracy by the 1991 and 2004 coup d'états that deposed exiled president Bertrand Aristide.

For more information see Canada Haiti Action Network: <http://canadahaitiaction.ca/>