

## One year after Trade Agreement with Colombia is implemented, EU remains silent

Brussels, August 7, 2014

August 1 marked the first year of provisional implementation of the multiparty trade agreement between the EU, Colombia and Peru. Despite promises made during the negotiation process, the treaty has not helped to improve the living conditions of the Colombian population. On the contrary, conflicts linked to export sectors and EU investment have continued and, in some cases, worsened.

*“Coal mining in the north of the country, for export to EU countries, continues to cause social and environmental conflicts. Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities continue to be deprived of water sources, due to water appropriation and pollution related to mining. Under this model of resource extraction for export purposes, the lands of ethnically diverse communities continue on a daily basis to suffer ever greater damages and negative changes. Despite this fact, transnational companies continue to operate because of the increasing economic benefits associated with coal mining”,* noted **Danilo Urrea, of Censat Agua Viva - Friends of the Earth Colombia**.

Moreover, despite the Colombian government’s assertions that the FTA would provide new opportunities in the countryside, conditions in the rural sector have not improved. As **Lyda Fernanda from TNI** suggests, *“a year after the national agrarian and popular strike, small-scale producers continue to receive low sale prices for their products, as well as facing the high costs of production and transportation, repression and criminalization of protest”*. What is more disturbing, *“is that the rural economy, the basis for national food production, is being threatened by free trade agreements”*.

In a statement on August 4, several trade unions and social organisations stated that *“one year on from the partial implementation of the FTA between Colombia, Peru and the EU; two years after the enactment of European Parliament Resolution 2628; more than three years since the signing of the Obama-Santos Labour Action Plan; and almost three years after the entry into force of the FTA between Canada and Colombia, the government is in debt and there have been setbacks in employment outsourcing and intermediaries, labour informality, violence against unions, impunity for crimes against trade unionists, anti-union practices (... )”*. The statement also noted that *“the hostile and repressive attitude of the Government towards social protest and union struggle has increased”*.

Despite the existence of legal instruments under the treaty, which were presented as tools for the protection of human rights, the situation for human rights defenders remains critical, and clear and transparent mechanisms for monitoring the human rights clause have not been developed by the institutions of the European Union. *“Between 2010 and 2013, murders of people who defend human rights in Colombia continued to increase, which means that the Colombian State’s protection system has not been effective”*, said **Christiane Schwarz from the Human Rights organisation kolko**.

*“This situation has met with a deafening silence from the European Union, despite assurances that the trade agreement would be a tool through which the EU could demand improvements in human rights in Colombia”,* says **Vincent Vallies, spokesperson for Oidhaco**, a network of 35 European organisations. Calling upon the European institutions, Vallies insists: *“the new European parliament should develop clear and transparent mechanisms for monitoring the roadmap. With things as they stand, we can only continue to draw the conclusion that the EU favours their economic interests over the fulfilment of human rights”*.