

American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations



815 Sixteenth Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20006
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Richard P. Hughes Jr.

April 30, 2008

The Honorable William D. Delahunt, Chairman
Subcommittee on International Organizations, Human Rights, and Oversight
U.S. House of Representatives
2170 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Delahunt:

On behalf of the nearly ten million working men and women of the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), I urge you to oppose the proposed \$500 million in security assistance to Mexico – the “Mérida Initiative” – included in the Administration’s FY 2008 supplemental funding request, as well as the additional funding requested for FY 2009.

Strengthening the capacity of the Mexican government to fight drug trafficking is an important and legitimate foreign policy objective. However, the strategy proposed by the Administration is ineffective and risks undermining our nation’s commitment to safeguard human rights. Many parts of the proposed aid package – for example, the eight military transport helicopters -- are of questionable value in combating drug trafficking, according to drug policy experts.

As leading human rights organizations, such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, have pointed out, the Mexican security forces have committed many serious human rights violations. Moreover, due to systemic corruption and institutional weaknesses, the parties responsible for these violations are rarely punished. Without significant and concrete improvements in institutional mechanisms to weed out criminals, provide training in human rights, and establish effective civilian oversight, additional funding to these security forces is likely to worsen corruption and violence.

We question whether increased funding to the military and police is the best way to enhance security. The most destabilizing forces in Mexico today are poverty, low wages and lack of decent work opportunities. These are the causes of crime, and they are also the forces pushing a half million Mexicans to emigrate to the United States every year. A serious approach to regional security would focus on the creation of decent work at decent wages, rather than additional military assistance.

Letter to The Honorable William D. Delahunt

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April 30, 2008

We are particularly concerned over Mexico's systematic and often violent violations of core labor rights.

- The director of the Mexico office of our affiliate, the Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC), Santiago Rafael Cruz, was murdered in Monterrey on April 9. There has been no serious effort by the state or federal governments to follow up on evidence provided by FLOC that suggests a link between Mr. Rafael's murder and his union activities.
- The Calderón administration and the mining company Grupo Mexico have launched a full-scale attack on the National Union of Mine and Metal Workers and its General Secretary, Napoleón Gómez Urrutia, including the arbitrary withdrawal of legal recognition from Gómez and other elected union leaders and the filing of baseless criminal charges. Three members of the union have been murdered, yet these crimes have not been investigated and no one has been punished. Nor has there been adequate investigation or follow-up with respect to the responsibility of Grupo Mexico officials for the deaths of 65 miners in the explosion at the Pasta de Conchos mine in February 2006.

These are but a few of the many cases of Mexico's violations of its international labor rights obligations as defined by the International Labor Organization. Any funding under the Mérida Initiative must, at minimum, establish a strong program of human rights certification based on making progress in resolving key cases such as these before funds are released. Absent such certification, we ask you to oppose the Administration's funding request.

Sincerely,



Barbara Shailor, Director
International Department

cc: The Honorable Howard L. Berman
Chairman, Committee on Foreign Affairs

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