

UNITE the Union, representing more than 1.5 million members in the UK and Ireland, condemns in the strongest possible terms the murder of yet another trade unionist in Colombia.

The assassination of FENSUAGRO activist Rafael Andres Gonzalez Garnica on the 16th August in the town of Cartagena del Chaira, took place just metres from a police permanent checkpoint. This latest killing comes in the midst of dangerous public accusations made against FENSUAGRO union members in the media, a spate of recent arrests and imprisonments of FENSUAGRO activists in the region of Putumayo, and constant death threats and intimidations received by the union's national leadership.

This appalling murder is yet more evidence that the situation in Colombia is not improving at all, despite the claims of the new regime of President Santos.

So far in 2011, 22 trade union colleagues have been assassinated in Colombia, and it is clear that paramilitaries, often working alongside state security forces, continue to operate with complete impunity, and continue to terrorise and murder trade unionists and human rights activists.

In the light of this latest atrocity we call for moves towards an EU-Colombia Free Trade Agreement to be halted immediately, as well as an end to all UK military aid to Colombia.

UNITE the Union has a proud history of working with FENSUAGRO, and on the basis of our common memberships in the agricultural sector, both unions' signed a partnership agreement in 2009. In this agreement, called 'Partnership for Life', UNITE recognised the specific targeting of FENSUAGRO and its members and pledged to do all we could to support them.

UNITE therefore not only condemns the state and paramilitary persecution still being inflicted on a daily basis on the union, but specifically calls on the Colombian regime to:

- Investigate the crimes being perpetrated;
- Bring those responsible for the hundreds of murders of FENSUAGRO members to justice;
- Guarantee the safety of all FENSUAGRO members;
- Immediately release all imprisoned FENSUAGRO members.

UNITE will continue to honour and build our partnership with our sister union in Colombia, and we send our deepest condolences to the union and to Mr Gonzalez' colleagues and family at this difficult time. We will continue denouncing these atrocious crimes, and support all efforts to bring about a politically negotiated settlement to the conflict.