



Addressing violations of labor rights and health standards in the Latin American cut flower industry

Flower Workers Unions like the UNTRAFLORES oppose the US - Colombia Free Trade Agreement (FTA).

- Poverty has increased and working and health conditions worsened under current Andean trade preferences which already set up free trade for Colombian flowers to enter the US.
- Nearly 2,600 trade unionists have been killed in Colombia since 1986 – more than the rest of the world combined. Less than three percent of unionist murders have been prosecuted.
- Once we allow brutal regimes permanent access to our market, we lose whatever leverage the US might have had to improve human rights.



- **About 60% of Colombian and Ecuadorean flower workers are women.** They occupy the lowest paying, most unstable jobs.
- **Discrimination is a serious problem.** Women workers suffer particular health problems as a result of pesticide exposure, including miscarriages and stillbirths. Employers frequently fire pregnant workers.
- **Two-thirds of Colombian flower workers reportedly suffer from occupational health problems.** Exposure to these toxins causes headaches, nausea, impaired vision, asthma, respiratory and neurological problems, and congenital malformations.
- **Flower workers get paid an average of \$7 a day,** the legal minimum wage, and are frequently denied compensation for forced overtime. This wage only covers appx. 45% of living costs.
- **The workweek is often 70-80 hours and up to 16 hours long** during the high season around Valentine's Day and Mother's Day.
- **The United States is a major importer of flowers from Andean countries.** Colombia is the second-largest flower exporting country after the Netherlands, and it produces 80% of the flowers imported by the United States.
- **Floriculture employers use dirty tactics to keep** workers from joining independent unions such as subcontracting and illegal firings.
- **Subcontracted and temporary workers are denied the right to join unions** and make up an increasing number of the workforce. They are exempt from receiving social, health, and maternity benefits. They are most likely to be underemployed or unemployed during an economic downturn, given their precarious positions.



International Labor Rights Forum
www.laborrights.org

Visit ILRF at www.laborrights.org, call (202) 347-4100, or write to laborrights@ilrf.org for more info.



What Can You Do to Support Flower Workers?

The importance of the U.S. market gives American consumers a significant opportunity to exert leverage on flower production and retail companies to encourage improvements in labor rights health and safety conditions in the industry.

Write a letter to your local supermarket or florist with the following DEMANDS (Contact ILRF for supermarket addresses and sample letters).

1. Respect workers' right to freedom of association. Don't fire workers who try to unionize.
2. Stop subcontracting out worker rights through "cooperatives" and temporary employment agencies.
3. Pay overtime wages, respect local laws on maximum hours per week, and stop using short fixed-term contracts as a way to deny job security, pensions, maternity leave, and health and injury insurance.
4. Only use the chemicals that have been approved by the EPA.
5. Provide all flower workers with free protective gear and train all workers in the proper use of chemicals and risk prevention.
6. Don't discriminate against pregnant workers.
7. Pay Workers a Living Wage



Tell Congress that expanding NAFTA to Colombia is a bad idea

- Call the U.S. Capitol Today 202-224-3121 to be connected to your House Representative. Then ask to get transferred to your Senators
- When you are connected to your representative and senators' offices, ask for the staffer handling trade issues. Tell him or her that you oppose the Colombia Free Trade Agreement.
- Tell them to support trade reform by supporting the TRADE Act. Ask for your Representative and Senators' to communicate their positions in writing by email or regular mail. Use a local or personal story of damage from bad trade deals to illustrate your case or use the talking points on the back of this flyer.

Tell Asocolflores to stop spreading lies!

- Asocolflores, the powerful Colombian Flower Growers Association has spent millions on a public relations campaign making false claims such as a) Flower industry players are socially responsible and engage in sustainable business practices. Yet, short term contracting is the rule and these same companies are unwilling to protect workers' right to organize. Women often face discrimination in the industry as they are confined to the lowest paid, most unstable positions, and they are often denied important maternity benefits and are forced to leave the workforce when they become pregnant. b) 14% of flower workers are unionized. In fact, most of these unions are company, or yellow unions such as Sinaltraflor. These unions are established by companies in order to keep real workers unions away and, thus, it is false to claim that these unions represent workers. Contact Augusto Solano at comunicaciones@ASOCOLFLORES.org and tell him to put money towards flower workers, not a PR campaign!
- Use holidays such as Valentine's Day and Mother's Day as an opportunity to raise awareness. Search www.laborrights.org for "Valentine's Day Lesson Plans" to find a number of ideas.
- Organize events such as brown-bag lunches on campus or in the office where you can distribute information and raise awareness.



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