

## **March ends in Cali- but the Colombian Government stands them up!**

In the wake of indiscriminant shooting by Colombian police against thousands Indigenous protesters in Cauca a march was organized to the city of Cali. 40,000 Indigenous People were joined by striking sugar cane workers whose leaders were arrested over the weekend.

They marched over four days, to meet with government officials-including President Uribe-who had promised to meet with them on Sunday October 27, 2008.

The promise to dialogue was made by President Uribe after acknowledging that police had shot into a crowd of thousands of Indigenous protesters in mid October ([see CNN video here](#)). Protesters waited in the city of Cali for over 4 hours but government officials did not show up citing security concerns. When the government officials finally arrived most of the protesters had already left the area.

Community leaders are still concerned about further violence and whether the Colombian government will negotiate in good faith and fulfill any commitments made, a serious problem in the past. The protesters are still calling on government officials to meet with them today but the officials insist that the meeting will not take place until next week in the city of Popayan (125 km away from the city of Cali).

Your support is needed to protect the indigenous and push for productive negotiations that will directly address the indigenous communities' concerns which include the U.S.- Colombia Free Trade Agreement and the failure of the Colombian administration to comply with agreements relating to indigenous land, education, and healthcare.

<!--[if !vml]--><!--[endif]-->*Sugarcane Workers*

According to the Washington Office on Latin America currently, sugar cane workers-most of whom are African descendents-currently earn roughly \$200 a month, work 14 or more hours a day, and have temporary labor contracts through worker cooperatives that don't provide any benefits such as health care. Working under brutal conditions with no protective gear, the workers suffer from skin and respiratory problems due to pesticide aerial spraying and sugar cane burning.

In mid September 18,000 workers in the sugar industry in Colombia's Cauca and Valle del Cauca Departments went on strike in response to the refusal by the Sugar Cane Growers' Association, Asocaña, to negotiate with them for better working conditions.

Two weeks into their protest the police responded with disproportionate violence. Forty workers were injured some gravely. Government officials tied the sugar cane workers to guerrilla terrorist groups -as they did with Indigenous protesters-simply because they were exercising their right to organize and strike.

On October 21st, four leaders of the sugar cane workers' movement and two of their advisors turned themselves in to the local authorities after being informed that there were warrants out for their arrests due to their work in organizing the stoppage. Early reports suggest they are being charged with instigating violence and on the ground contacts report that others are likely to be detained. The workers are asking that their right to organize and their right to strike be respected. **As you read this, lives are on the line, and the U.S. State Department can make a difference. Please call the State Department- Call Susan Sanford, Colombia Desk Officer, 202- 647-3142 and urge them to demand protection for the rights of the workers.**