

RESOLUTION 56

Opposing FTA with Colombia in Solidarity with Afro-Colombians

Submitted by Metropolitan Washington Council (D.C.)
Referred to the International Labor Committee

WHEREAS, according to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, the national unemployment rate in June 2009 was 9.7 percent and unemployment rates were higher in June than a year earlier in all 372 metropolitan areas. The existing racial employment gaps are expected to grow wider. For instance, unemployment rates in Michigan are expected to reach approximately 25 percent for African Americans, in line with the peak rates of the Great Depression. This precarious economic climate continues to demonstrate the serious flaws of the neo-liberal model and of initiatives such as the Free Trade Area of the Americas, which benefit large multinational corporations at the expense of everyday citizens, food security, the environment and human rights; and

WHEREAS, the damage to U.S. workers caused by North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)-type trade deals is well documented. When NAFTA passed, many factories and jobs were exported to places where people worked cheaper. It is estimated that over 412,177 U.S. workers were certified as "NAFTA casualties," leaving most either unemployed or working jobs for less pay; and

WHEREAS, corporate trade and investment liberalization policies embodied by NAFTA have contributed to increasing income inequality in the United States and Mexico. NAFTA provisions treated the United States, Canada and Mexico equally, notwithstanding huge asymmetries in terms of Mexico's economics, technology, production factors and agricultural policies. U.S.

Trade Representative Ron Kirk has stated it is not necessary to renegotiate NAFTA, despite a campaign promise by President Barack Obama to strengthen NAFTA's labor and environmental provisions; and

WHEREAS, NAFTA negotiations took place without previous consultation with Mexico's civil society and independent trade union movement, and this continues with other free trade agreements, such as the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement. In Colombia, this is of particular concern for Afro-descendant and indigenous populations. Lack of previous consultation is a violation of the Law 70 of the Black Communities (1993), ILO Convention 169 and Order 005 of the Colombian Constitutional Court; and

WHEREAS, President Obama has asked U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk to clear remaining obstacles to a separate pact with Colombia, a country experiencing a massive human rights crisis given over 40 years of internal conflict; and

WHEREAS, there are more murders of union leaders in Colombia than in the rest of the world combined. Over the past 23 years, thousands of trade union members have been killed at a rate of approximately one every three days, and impunity is widespread; and

WHEREAS, Colombia is undergoing the worst displacement crisis in the Western Hemisphere, and women and children are disproportionately affected. The number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Colombia is second only

to Sudan's, a country undergoing genocide. According to the Consultancy for Human Rights and Displacement (CODHES), 380,000 people became newly displaced in 2008, a 24 percent increase over 2007, and a disproportionate number of the total IDP population were Afro-descendants (over 30 percent) and indigenous peoples. Factors such as the continued internal armed conflict, human rights violations, drug trafficking, aerial fumigation and the illegal and violent appropriation of collective territories continue to accelerate displacement in Colombia; and

WHEREAS, Colombia is home to over 4 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and Colombia's Constitutional Court in its T-025 ruling of April 2004 and subsequent orders has called for the protection of internally displaced Afro-Colombians and indigenous peoples and of the rights of IDP women and leaders. The Constitutional Court ordered authorities to formulate a prevention and protection plan for 62 Afro-Colombian territories at risk of internal displacement to construct a targeted policy to address the needs of Afro-Colombian IDPs; and

WHEREAS, in August 2009 alone, the Colombian government noted it will evict 1,502 families from the Community Council of La Toma, in the North Cauca Region of Colombia, and give 6,500 of its 7,000 hectares to the foreign mining company Anglo Gold Ashanti as well as permanent license to exploit the gold in the region. This was done without previous community consultation and will have consequences for the traditional miner families, who have inhabited their lands since 1636 and live primarily from gold mining; and

WHEREAS, Afro-descendants make up over 26 percent of the Colombian population and the Afro-Colombian civil rights movement has overcome immeasurable obstacles to achieve full recognition of their political and social rights and economic reparations in the form of collective control of ancestral territories and resources. They continue to struggle against the legacies of racism and government neglect for their

well-being and continue to be forced off of their collective territories without compensation by fighting between paramilitaries, guerrillas and Colombian military forces and by actors wanting land for illicit purposes or for mega-projects that exploit community resources; and

WHEREAS, Afro-Colombian communities oppose the Colombia FTA in part because of investor rights provisions that limit their hard-earned rights, making it harder to regain stolen land, further incentive for violent displacement paving the way for mega-projects; and

WHEREAS, in the fall of 2009, the Colombian government and coffee and flower growers have planned an \$800,000 public relations offensive to dot Washington, D.C., and New York with three-dimensional fiberglass heart sculptures. Visitors will also be able to download free Colombian music, sample Colombian coffee and view photography. The campaign manager has been quoted as saying that if the tourism effort "can help" get the free trade deal approved it would be great, but insists it is not political—all this while the average per capita income among Afro-Colombians is between \$500 and \$600 a year and while more resources are needed to address very serious issues with respect to violence and labor law reform;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the AFL-CIO, in solidarity with the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists (CBTU), opposes the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement (FTA) on behalf of U.S. workers, Colombian workers and Afro-Colombians alike. In its current form, the agreement constitutes an egregious violation of human rights and, in a country still engaged in a five-decade old war, would only entrench violent intersections of conflict and commerce; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that the AFL-CIO calls on its federal elected officials to publicly oppose the Colombia FTA on the same grounds, and further work to ensure diffusion of accurate information regarding the reality confronting Afro-Colombians.