



Colombia: The Facts on Labor Rights and Security

Violence is Down: The Colombian government has greatly reduced rates of violent crime in recent years, most dramatically among trade unionists. Even accepting the statistics cited by the AFL-CIO, homicide rates are higher in the United States (5.0 per 100,000) as among Colombian labor union members (3.4 per 100,000). A resident of the District of Columbia is seven times more likely to be murdered than a Colombian labor union member.

Homicide rates (per 100,000) ¹	
Caracas, Venezuela	130 ²
New Orleans	52
Baltimore	37
Colombia	26 ³
Washington, D.C.	24
World	7.6
United States	5.0 ⁴
Colombian labor union members	3.4 ⁵

Colombia's Unions Are Thriving: Far from being persecuted, Colombia's labor unions have grown significantly in recent years. The number of Colombian workers affiliated with labor unions rose from 850,000 (4.9% of workforce) in 2002 to 1,500,000 (7.9%) in 2009 — an increase of more than 75% and one of the most dramatic rises in unionization anywhere in the world. The number of labor unions increased from 1,447 unions in 2001 to 2,135 unions in 2009.

Recognition of Colombia's Respect for Labor Rights: In June 2010, the International Labor Organization (ILO) dropped Colombia from its list of countries subject to monitoring for failure to comply with international labor rights. The rights of Colombian workers are protected by a robust legal framework that reflects the fact that Colombia has ratified 60 ILO Conventions, including all eight so-called "core conventions." The ILO has described as "satisfactory" Colombia's recent expansion of collective bargaining and its new 30-year statute of limitations for prosecution of homicides of labor union members and human rights defenders. Under the Action Plan agreed by President Obama and Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos, additional reforms are under way to bolster worker rights.

Impunity has Ended: To prosecute acts of violence in 200 "priority cases" identified in consultation with Colombia's trade unions — mostly homicides in the 1990s and the early 2000s — a special unit of prosecutors was created. By December 2009, the team had convicted 334 individuals in connection with these cases. Significant new resources will be dedicated to these efforts under the Action Plan.

Labor Leaders Receiving Security: Since 2002, Colombia has tripled the budget for its program to ensure the safety of vulnerable segments of society such as labor union members, judges, and journalists. More than 1,900 union members and 10,000 judges, human rights workers, and journalists have been included in this \$360 million program, which has an unblemished record of success. The program is being expanded under the Action Plan.

¹ U.S. city figures are from 2009 FBI [statistics](#); country figures are from the Geneva Declaration's 2008 report.

² *Christian Science Monitor*.

³ Preliminary figures for 2010, cited by *Washington Post*, Dec. 21, 2010.

⁴ [FBI](#).

⁵ National Labor School, Colombia's leading union-affiliated think tank focusing on labor rights.