

**Update from an April 2003
interview with Edgar Paez,
President of Barrancabermeja
section of Sinaltrainal**

The U.S. court of Florida said we can continue our investigation but only against against Panamco Beverages, Bebidas y Alimentos of Uraba and Richard Kirby, owner of a bottling company.

Unfortunately Coca Cola International and Coca Cola Colombia were put outside the investigation. We are persevering in the U.S. and putting before the court the documents and the evidence to continue the investigation against Coca Cola. The court considered continuing the investigation based on the symbiotic relationship between the paramilitaries and the Colombian state. The transnational could have avoided the crimes that were committed by issuing a public statement against the paramilitaries.

To hide its culpability for this state of affairs, the company operates its bottling plants worldwide as franchises, or individual bottling contracts. Yet we say that Coca-Cola is responsible-because we have made it aware of all these acts of aggression and it has done nothing.

We point to attorney Jaime Dejar Cuello to demonstrate the ties between the state and the company. He was formerly the authority to whom we denounced several of the cases of the company's murder, persecution and abuse. Now, in a claim that Coca-Cola brought against us, he is the transnational corporation's legal representative. Thus those who represent the state at a later time represent the companies.

All these cases have come to the knowledge of justice system. It has not investigated, punished or stopped the abuses; nor has it redressed the damages caused. The processes are delayed, the cases end up in archives-and we, the victims, end up the subject of a lawsuit.

Even when judges have found Coca-Cola's officials guilty of violating the workers' right to organize and meet, those same officials continue committing the same offenses at Coca-Cola's bottling plants. Officials who commit abuses and are caught are simply transferred to other bottling plants. Thus they maintain impunity. There is no punishment-not even when there is clear, solid proof.

As result of the policy of impunity, the union organization at the Coca-Cola Corp. is at the brink of disappearing. The terror campaign is very serious. The fear felt by the workers inside the plants is tremendously high. The blackmail we suffer every day is immense.

In due course, we have also given account of all this to the United States government. But it has not taken any action about it either.

I conclude by informing you that despite all this and given Colombian justice's failure to act, we have sued Coca-Cola in the United States District Court in the Southern District of Florida for murder, for kidnapping, for torture or incarceration, and for death threats against workers.

However, Coca-Cola deems our resort to the courts a crime. And thus we are being sued for having sued Coca-Cola. So now it is a crime to seek justice. This is astonishing.

THIS IS THE STATE OF AFFAIRS FOR THE COLOMBIAN TRADE UNION MOVEMENT

To a greater or lesser extent, many workers face these same conditions. It is the river of blood, it is the price that we have to pay for fighting against these monsters that want to get rich at the expense of the suffering, the blood, and the riches of the Colombian people. For this simple reason, we request here in this forum that Coca-Cola be declared responsible for all these crimes. We ask the audience to extend solidarity, not only to Sinaltrainal but to all the workers and the entire trade union movement in Colombia.

We ask for justice. We ask for truth. And we ask for reparations. Because we hurt for the deaths of our sisters and brothers, we hurt for the suffering of our children, our families. Coca-Cola has caused a lot of damage through these crimes-as well as through all its looting of the riches that it has taken from Colombia throughout for over 100 years. It has contributed to the impoverishment of the communities. It has contributed to the attack against the rights and the sovereignty of the Colombian people.

**International Action Center
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Coca-Cola has also attacked Black people in the United States. This was made evident in a lawsuit for racial discrimination that Coca-Cola lost in U.S. courts.

At a hearing in Brussels, Coca Cola's crimes in a town in India were denounced. In that town the transnational corporation took control of a river. Coca-Cola stole the community's water and made it inaccessible. It took the water, which belongs to the people of the area, forcing them to buy it back from Coca-Cola. So now the community has decided to expel the corporation.

The same thing has occurred in the sister republic of Venezuela. Our sisters and brothers there, through the Laureano Bendia Committee, have launched a campaign against the corporations that are financing the disinformation campaign aimed at overthrowing the democratic, popular government of Hugo Chávez. Coca-Cola is amongst these companies. The sisters and brothers from the Committee of Displaced Workers of Venezuela also speak of the company's abuses in Venezuela.

COCA COLA IN COLOMBIA

It is a little-known but outrageous example of Coca-Cola's policies that while the poorest people in Colombia struggle to acquire that precious liquid, water, the Colombian government favors Coca-Cola with prices for water that are below those paid by these poorest people. Bear in mind that water makes up 80 percent of Coca Cola's intake products. This type of aggression against the population is unacceptable.

Coca-Cola has 18 plants in Colombia under the name Panamco Colombia. Three different plants, one in Florencia, one in Leticia, and one in Urabá, are the property of a U.S. citizen named Richard Kirby. In these plants Coca-Cola has 10,587 workers. Eighty percent of them are subcontracted. These workers are practically working for free. Their conventional rights are stolen. They have none of the benefits of the nominal labor laws. And they are not even allowed to unionize.



At the same time, Coca-Cola has laid off over 5,000 workers in Colombia.

Coca-Cola has used the device of accusing the workers of being guerrillas, to charge us with being terrorists. It has charged that we meet together to plan crimes. It has sued us criminally, bringing insult and calumny against us. But with no evidence, the courts decreed our innocence and the processes were concluded in our favor. Yet Coca-Cola has said openly that it uses this strategy so that the paramilitary groups will act against Sinaltrainal and our sisters and brothers.

According to a published article, in 1998 Coca-Cola officials met with paramilitary leader Carlos Castaño in Córdoba. They also made contact in Montería on Aug. 15, 1998.

And as if that is not enough, there is an October 2002 testimony stating that the paramilitary groups continue to enter Barrancabermeja's bottling plant to meet with company officials. When Coca-Cola is asked to give a sensible explanation for this state of affairs, it goes to the paramilitaries and tells them we are making public accusations against them. And it sues us for making public its relationship with the paramilitary groups.

Eight Coca-Cola workers have been assassinated-four of them within the context of collective bargaining. The clearest message was the murder of Isidro Segundo.

We presented the labor contract proposal on Nov. 18. On Dec. 5, the day prescribed by law for the negotiation, they