



Education unions in Britain and Ireland express support for democracy and trade union rights in Colombia

20 February 2024

C.C.

Office of the Attorney General

Office of the Inspector General

National Ombudsman

Ministry of Labour

Federation of Colombian Educators, FECODE

Embassy of United Kingdom in Colombia

Embassy of Ireland in Colombia

As education unions in Britain and Ireland that have long supported trade union rights in Colombia, we express our concern over the recent targeting of the Federation of Colombian Educators (FECODE) on allegations relating to its support for the electoral campaign of President Gustavo Petro, and the implications of other recent actions by state institutions to unduly influence democratic processes.

We are particularly alarmed at FECODE's warning that there "exists a coordinated strategy to destabilise" the government, a situation which led the Organization of American States on 9 February to state that it "condemns and repudiates the threats to interrupt the constitutional mandate of President Petro".

Despite FECODE having demonstrated that it legally donated to the Colombia Humana political movement, the Attorney General's Office and sections of the media have insinuated that improper conduct occurred. The 22 January raid took place two days before the Inspector General suspended the Foreign Minister, who has played a key role in peacebuilding, on tenuous grounds. It is notable that both the Attorney General and the Inspector General were appointed under the previous government of Ivan Duque, a strong opponent of the current government of Gustavo Petro and its policies around social reforms and peace talks.

Through our partnerships with the British-Irish organisation Justice for Colombia, our unions have supported FECODE's campaigns to improve conditions for Colombian public education workers and their students. Our members have met with FECODE trade unionists in Colombia, Britain and Ireland, while we have campaigned for an end to anti-trade union aggression that disproportionately impacts education workers.

Colombian teacher trade unionists continue to face appalling violence, with more than 30 killed since the 2016 peace agreement, while hostility towards FECODE is promoted by certain high-profile political figures. We call for the long-running campaign of delegitimisation and stigmatisation against FECODE to stop and for the union's legal right to democratic campaigning to be protected.

With Colombia at a critical stage in dialogues with armed groups, alongside the urgent need to confront dire social conditions that continue to affect many communities, we hope that the

confirmation of a new Attorney General will facilitate the inter-institutional coordination necessary to confront these serious challenges.

Our education unions reaffirm our commitment to working alongside FECODE and the Colombian trade union movement to strengthen democratic processes, improve security for trade unionists and achieve fairer conditions for all workers. We also call for an end to, in the words of FECODE, “the systematic action to stigmatise, smear, elevate false charges [and] spread an unfounded hate campaign” against the Federation and its members. To conclude, we extend our full support to all those working towards permanent peace in Colombia.

Signed:



Andrea Bradley, General Secretary, EIS



John Boyle, General Secretary, INTO



Patrick Roach, General Secretary, NASUWT



Daniel Kebede, General Secretary, NEU



Jo Grady, General Secretary, UCU