



Supporting Teachers in Colombia

“We are proud to stand alongside our Colombian colleagues in their pursuit of a brighter future.”

Joint statement by British and Irish education unions
EIS, INTO, NASUWT, NEU and UCU



Education workers form Colombia's most organised trade union sector. The FECODE teacher federation, the ASPU universities union and others take regular action to demand fairer labour conditions, higher funding in public education and improved opportunities for young people from marginalised backgrounds. Historic underinvestment has left many young people unable to access the learning they need.

Educator trade unionists have also faced appalling violence. According to FECODE, more than 1,000 teachers have been murdered since the mid-1980s and countless others threatened, attacked or forced from their homes. Far-right politicians from establishment parties routinely smear teacher trade unionists with false accusations of indoctrinating and harming children.

The 2022 election of Colombia's first progressive government has raised hopes that these issues would finally be addressed, particularly with former FECODE president Gloria Ramírez as Labour Minister, a series of proposed social reforms and a commitment to implementing the 2016 peace agreement and talks with remaining armed groups. However, international support is fundamental to help achieve genuine change.

Lack of access to education

- Urban students complete on average 9.4 years of schooling compared with 5.5 years for rural students.
- Only around 40% of children who enroll at primary school go on to graduate from secondary school.
- Ongoing conflict prevents children from attending school and accessing essential services, while it puts them at risk from armed groups and causes psychological harm.

From 1980 to 2020, an average of 27 teachers were murdered per year – **the equivalent of one every thirteen days**

“Colombian teachers play a vital role in building a fairer society for future generations. But historically we've been attacked simply for standing up for the rights of workers and young people. The international solidarity we receive from British and Irish trade unions through Justice for Colombia helps us strengthen our movement and defend peace with social justice.”

Martha Alfonso – FECODE International Secretary



Trade union solidarity

Irish and British education unions are committed to supporting trade unionists in Colombia. Members of education unions have visited Colombia on JFC delegations. They have passed conference motions in support of trade union rights. They have lobbied their governments to support peacebuilding, fairer labour conditions and justice for victims of historic state violence. They fund and support JFC's work in defence of trade unionism, human rights and peace.

Why are teacher and academic trade unionists targeted?

- They speak out loudly in support of improved work conditions.
- They are community leaders in the struggle for peace, human rights and social justice.
- They protect their students from recruitment by armed groups and other forms of illegal activity.

The progressive government proposes peace talks and social reforms to improve conditions for education workers after neglect by previous administrations. Trade union demands include:

- Improved health coverage.
- State investment in public education infrastructure.
- Universal access to education across all age groups.
- Guaranteed right to trade union activity.
- An end to murders of trade unionists and social activists.
- Peace negotiations with armed groups and full implementation of the 2016 agreement.



Steven Chalarcá

Murdered in Antioquia, 12 September 2023

Steven was attacked at his workplace, the Guillermo Aguilar School, where he was a popular teacher of primary and secondary students. He was an active trade unionist in the ADIDA union for teachers in Antioquia.



Luz Stella Balanta Solis

Murdered in Cauca, 20 September 2023

Luz Stella was struck by a car bomb while walking to work in one of Colombia's most violent regions. She was a teacher at the José María Córdoba Educational Institution and trade unionist in the FECODE-affiliated SUTEV union.



Guillermo Otero

Murdered in Magdalena, 11 March 2024

Guillermo was attacked outside his home as he returned from the Euclides Lizarazo School, where he had worked for over 20 years. A member of the FECODE-affiliated EDUMAG union, Guillermo had previously survived an attack in 2019.

“Support Teachers in Colombia! Support Justice for Colombia!”



Andrea Bradley,
General Secretary



John Boyle,
General Secretary



Patrick Roach,
General Secretary



Daniel Kebede,
General Secretary



Jo Grady,
General Secretary



What can you do to help?

- Affiliate your branch or as an individual to JFC
- Write to your MP about the situation in Colombia
- Move motions in your trade union to support Colombian activists
- Follow JFC on social media and inform others about Colombia
- Invite JFC to talk at your union events

What does JFC do?

- Highlight the situation for teachers in Colombia
- Mobilise political support in British and Irish Parliaments
- Promote solidarity from the British and Irish trade union movements
- Provide permanent support to teachers on the front line in Colombia

*for Peace
and Social Justice
in Colombia*

For more information and to affiliate to JFC at branch, division or regional level, [visit our website](http://www.justiceforcolombia.org) and click on 'Join'!

www.justiceforcolombia.org



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