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BAUCUS URGES COLOMBIA TO BUILD ON PROGRESS PROTECTING LABOR RIGHTS, REDUCING LABOR VIOLENCE

Finance Chair Meets with Colombian Unions, Labor NGOs, Prosecutors to Discuss How to Further Improve Labor Conditions

Washington, DC – Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.) met today with the presidents of two major Colombian labor union federations and the Prosecutor General of Colombia to discuss labor rights issues and Colombia's efforts to prosecute violence against union leaders. Yesterday, Baucus met with representatives of the AFL-CIO Solidarity Center and an attorney who works closely with the Escuela Nacional Sindical (ENS), the leading labor non-governmental organization in Colombia.

"Colombia has made great progress in strengthening labor rights and reducing violence against labor leaders, but the murder of even one union member is intolerable, and must be prosecuted aggressively," said Baucus. **"I wanted to meet with these groups firsthand to see what more can be done on these issues. We need to develop a concrete plan to address these issues so that we can move forward with approval of the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement (FTA)."**

Once implemented the FTA would help address many labor concerns. The FTA includes an enforceable obligation to adopt and maintain in law the five fundamental labor rights laid out by the International Labor Organization: freedom of association, the right to collective bargaining, the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labor, the effective abolition of child labor and a prohibition on the worst forms of child labor, and the elimination of workforce discrimination. Baucus noted that the enforcement mechanisms for the labor provisions would be as strong as those for the commercial provisions of the trade agreement.

Colombia has also made significant progress in reducing the level of violence against unionists and prosecuting the perpetrators. Since 2002, homicides have decreased more than 50 percent while kidnappings have declined by 93 percent. Between 2002 and 2007, the Prosecutor General's Office convicted 156 people in 73 cases involving trade unionists. With regard to 187 cases identified by Colombia's labor unions as their top priorities for prosecution, 38 people were convicted in 2007 alone, with many others currently before the judiciary.

Baucus met with Viviane Morales, the Prosecutor General of Colombia, a position roughly equivalent to the Attorney General in the U.S., to discuss her office's plans to further this progress and reduce Colombia's impunity rate, particularly with respect to union leaders.

The Obama Administration has pledged to intensify engagement with Colombia to resolve outstanding issues so the FTA can be brought before Congress as soon as possible. Last week, [Baucus and Finance Committee Ranking Member Orrin Hatch sent a letter to U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk](#) asking him to present a specific list of additional steps that Colombia should take when he testifies before the Finance Committee on March 9. Baucus has called for resolution of these issues and approval of the FTA as soon as possible this year.