



For Immediate Release

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UNION GROUP CALLS ON ILO TO SUPPORT THREATENED G4S WORKERS, CLAIMS THAT PANAMA TRUMPS INTERNATIONAL LABOR STANDARDS

June 7, 2007

The government of Panama violated international labour laws when it did not respect, protect and promote the core trade union rights of nearly 600 private security guards employed by G4S (formerly Group 4 Securicor), a multinational security company with operations in Panama, according to a complaint submitted today to the International Labour Organization. (ILO). The Panamanian National Union of Security Agency Employees (UNTAS) and the UNI Global Union (UNI) filed the complaint.

According to UNTAS and UNI, Panama has failed to enforce ILO principles in the interests of the Panamanian G4S private security, violating ILO Conventions 87 and 98 “when it did not respect, protect and promote the core trade union rights of the guards.”

On February 16th 2007, Panamanian workers were attacked while holding a peaceful vigil outside the company’s offices in Panama City. Workers were robbed of cash and belongings and one was injured badly enough to require hospitalization. Two persons were arrested at the scene of this attack by local police, detective transcripts identify at least one as a G4S employee.

Martin Cubilla, General Secretary of UNTAS and a former G4S security officer, who also suffered cuts and bruises, remarked: “A company employee who beat up workers was promoted. Instead, he should have been fired. Workers in Panama expect multinationals who operate in our country to respect us, not harm us.” He also called on workers and their allies in the U.S. and elsewhere to support the workers at G4S Valores, S.A.

Cubilla pointed out that the U.S. Congress has yet to ratify the pending US-Panama Free Trade Agreement. “As Panamanian workers, we look to the US to assist us in raising standards for all workers in Panama and the US. Trade agreements should be raising global standards, not lowering them. Our current situation should be considered as the US Congress decides whether or not to ratify the final agreement.”

The complaint alleges that from August 2006 to the present, G4S:

- Transferred 380 workers between its two units in Panama, under the pretext of corporate restructuring, with the intent and effect of weakening the union and undermining collective bargaining. Meanwhile, UNTAS was attempting to negotiate crucial benefits in one of the units for over six years;

- Illegally terminated 39 unionists, and disciplined many more, for participating in peaceful protests seeking to assert their rights under the law;
- Provided financial, material and legal support to people who violently attacked and robbed trade union leaders. G4S staff members and at least one manager were allegedly also involved;
- Deducted and then withheld union dues from the duly elected union, undermining its stability and morale;
- Threatened trade union members and leaders with criminal sanctions and civil suits that had little or no foundation in law, but were clearly designed to harass and intimidate these activists.

According to UNTAS and UNI, Panama's Labour Ministry has repeatedly declined to investigate or prosecute charges of labour law violations brought by workers. It has also refused to intervene to end G4S support for a campaign to topple the union's leaders.

The complaint asks that the Committee on Freedom of Association issue a recommendation instructing Panama to ensure reinstatement of terminated workers with full back pay and to promote access to justice by examining the stalled civil and administrative appeals filed by UNTAS. "We would also like to have the Committee recommend that the Panamanian government engage G4S and both UNTAS and UNI in constructive dialogue that could lead to a lasting resolution of these concerns," said Christy Hoffman, the UNI Property Service organizing director.

Workers at Wackenhut, G4S's subsidiary in Panama, began their vigil in October 2006. UNTAS also alleges that the company violated both national law and the union's collective bargaining agreement by not providing security officers with weapons in good repair, radios, uniforms, ammunition, bulletproof vests, and other equipment necessary to fulfil their duties.

G4S is the largest security provider in the world with more than 470,000 workers in over 100 countries.

G4S and its subsidiary Wackenhut have been the focus of concern regarding the treatment of its global workforce. According to a complaint recently lodged by UNI with the UK government, which alleges violations of the OECD Guidelines for multinationals, G4S's global record is characterized by only occasional recognition of unions, very low coverage by collective bargaining agreements, and anti-union conduct. An international delegation of trade unionists, civil rights and human rights activists and academics travelled to southern Africa in May, 2007, to meet with G4S workers and unions there regarding their workplace treatment. Their report, "Who Protects the Guards?" is available on the websites www.uniglobalunion.org/property and www.focusongroup4securicor.org. The company provides an array of services to multinationals including banks, oil companies, mining operations and international organizations and government embassies, including embassies for countries like the U.K. and the US.

UNI is the largest international grouping of individual trade unions. It brings together over 900 unions representing over 15 million members in the service industries. UNI Property Service Global Union brings together national unions around the globe working together to improve the lives of workers who clean, secure and maintain buildings and grounds, as well as other private security workers.