

Luz Marina Díaz

Good morning to everyone.

My name is Luz Marina Díaz Jiménez. I was born and live in Colombia, a country in South America's northwest corner. In 1800, Colombia fought and became independent from the Spanish crown, but since then has only enjoyed only a relative sense of peace between 1901 and 1948. The other 167 years there have been several civil wars and conflicts, mainly due to the conditions of poverty and inequality, arising from the way Colombia was governed.

According to the Gini coefficient, my country is the second one most unequal in Latin America, despite having water reserves, oxygen and farmland, that would be the envy of any nation in the "first world".

Currently it is one of the most solid and strongest economies in Latin America, and one of the few continues growing in GDP, despite the global recession. However, despite the prosperity, poverty still reaches levels up to 46% percent and extreme poverty affects 22% of the population according to recent government figures. The richest 20% of the country consume 60% of its revenues. This is despite Colombia's continued effort at increasing rates of foreign investment, over the past 30 years. Why all this foreign investment? The answer is to supply cheap labor, to the large international capital work.

Within this wave of investment, for more than 15 years the French multinational Carrefour arrived in Colombia to create supermarket chain and commercial buildings.

While we celebrate with great enthusiasm this type of investment. We know Carrefour Colombia didn't arrive to improve working and living conditions of the workers that hired. Highlighting once again that those who hold the economical and political power, are those who really profit.

As with many multinational companies, Carrefour arrived to supply cheap labor to international markets by utilizing unfair treatment and arbitrary dismissals. It became common practice, to subject the workers to unfair treatment and arbitrary dismissals. Those who enter this market, had to wait over a year to be allowed an indefinite term, but their contract could be finished at anytime, as the workers were not covered by any fair disciplinary process. Thanks to the Colombian governments complacency, Carrefour could afford to continue its practices in Colombia. Colombia remained the only country, which did not carry out the overall framework agreement for the implementation of association signed with the UNI Global Union in November 2000.

In 2010 Colombia started getting out from one of the darkest political periods. Over the last 8 years, the government maintained an indifferent attitude, towards the rights of workers, and created administrative barriers to the development trade unions and consistently ignored threats, persecutions, murders and massacres in public and private sectors.



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The government, accused unions of using guerrilla tactics and even terrorism. However in 2010 things began to change. Not so much by government initiative, rather through the application of international pressure on Colombia, as part of the conditions to sign up to international Free Trade Agreement. These conditions advocated for greater trade union freedoms. The UNI successfully lobbied for Carrefour to comply with the Global Framework Agreement and on November 21st, 2011, the Union of Workers was born and Large Area Trade in Colombia.

This did not mean that the issue of workers rights was achieved, but it marked the beginning. The workers of the retail sector are young, and in their mind their fear and distrust of the Union outweighed their need to be treated with respect, dignity and improved living conditions, the government's work to discredit the union movement had been done well.

But this obstacle was overcome by the UNI, or the Union, as we began to call it. With the strength and support of everyone working in the retail services sector and trade associated with the UNI, we started to walk the length and breadth of our country, we made more than 140 visits, we spoke with more than 3.600 workers. Although Carrefour facilities were provided for these talks, they neglected to raise awareness about the union and its role in middle management staff. The UNI and the Union, had to fight and confront two big obstacles: the apathy of young people to unionism and strong opposition from managers and supervisors, who feared losing their power to the Unions.

But the Unions didn't die. The Union and the UNI, supported by an aggressive but friendly, cheerful, colorful, marketing campaign; supported by a serious social media strategy, managed to cover more than 72 stores, located in 28 cities up to a thousand kilometers apart.

The most important thing is to remember, that thanks to the support from all of you, colleagues and workers of the world, we bring down the wall of fear.

I would like some day, that you would visit Colombia so that we may talk directly with the Union's young to feel the pride that I feel today, in the voice of a young 25 year old talking about labor rights, fair disciplinary process, respectful treatment, decent work, decent life.

The union has grown from only 124 members to more than 5.500 members between 2011 and 2014. We have members in all countries cities and stores of Carrefour. We have also successfully negotiated two collective agreements, one with Carrefour and another one with Cencosud. We have been responsible, done the homework and known how to use the resources effectively.

This is a country where the association to unions is only 4% and the incidence of collective agreement is just 2%.

Within our Collective Agreements we provide for an ongoing dialogue with the directors of Cencosud. Thanks to this, and working actively with management we are able to improve the working conditions of our members.

In 2012 Carrefour left Colombia, resulting in the layoffs of many workers and realizing their worst fears. But thanks to the presence of the Union supported by the UNI, the impact was able to be mitigated. The Unions were able to negotiate guaranteed work for more than 11,000 Colombians affected.

Today, we are fighting with Cencosud, because the directive managers in Colombia refuse to recognize the Union memberships obtained since October 2013. The reason for such an action is to prevent consolidated recognition in Cencosud and allow unions to bring those practices to trade companies across Colombia. That's why I am here, a women as leader organizer in between of a Colombian patriarchal and sexist unionism, to tell you that Colombia needs your support. For the first time of over 60 years of internal conflict, my country has a high chance to get and sing the peace. If it gets the stage for social dialogue and assertive unionism labor, would be biggest than the actual unionism.

Today I'm here with a new prospective. A prospective from a nation that yeans for a second period of peace for us and future generations. We aspire for decent work and decent life conditions.

I am here to tell you to not ignore us. We still need your valuable support, you will be part of a new nation with workers whose efforts pave the way for a brighter future for the next generation.

So, thank you so much! And to tell you we are counting on you.



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