

Statement by Yessika Hoyos Morales

**House Committee on Education and Labor
Honorable George Miller, Chairman**

**“Examining Workers’ Rights and Violence against Labor Union Leaders in
Colombia”**

February 12, 2009

I am Yessika Hoyos Morales, daughter of Jorge Darío Hoyos Franco, one of the 2,694 labor unionists murdered with impunity in Colombia.

Eight years ago I was living with my mother, my sister and my father in Fusagasugá. He was a man with dreams; he was very committed to the cause of justice; he was deeply pained by oppression and poverty. That is why he was very committed to the union fight from the time he was very young. He started working with national agrarian organizations, and his leadership took him to the international federation of agricultural workers, and then to the international federation of miners.

In our town, my father worked broadly with the labor unions, student organizations, women’s organizations. He worked to defend the rights of communities, he was widely recognized and loved by the people for his work.

My father was a cheerful, generous man. He showed us tenderness, love and solidarity with others. He was our friend and our hero, the man who gave us advice, who helped us discover the world.

From the time I was a little girl, I was witness to raids on our house by police, threats to my father. We received phone calls, funeral prayer cards, funeral wreaths, persecution. That

was how I learned that union activity in Colombia is dangerous, and that thinking and protesting puts your life at risk.

However, we were happy until the night of March 3, 2001, when two confessed paramilitary hit men, shot my father repeatedly in the face until he was dead. My mother, and my sister, who was only 14 years old, found him on the ground with blood running down his body, now without his smile, without his dreams, without his kisses and hugs to give us.

The murderers made good on their threats. My father made good on his word—he never gave in to the demand that he stop fighting for the people. That was the first death, the death of a union leader, my father. But then, the murderers attempted a second and definitive killing, the one they are trying to impose on us in Colombia, the one that is clad with forgetting and impunity.

The very day of the funeral, the tragedy took another turn. Threats, harassment, persecution started against us, so that we wouldn't make any denouncements or claims. And because of that we had to leave our home and hide out in Bogotá, where we were found anyway, to the extent that we had to move five times in a single year.

And as with the other 2,694 murders of unionists, impunity began to be cast the very night of that horrific crime, when the perpetrators were caught, two young hit men, who were immediately visited in their cell by a police officer who told them what to say in their statements. The investigational hypothesis cast by the authorities held that it was a crime caused because my father had gotten involved with another man's wife. This is the typical

explanation the Colombian authorities give to cover up the truth, to deny that people are murdered there for being labor unionists.

True to my father, following his example of passion for truth and justice, at 17, I joined the same battle that thousands of young people, widows, parents, brothers and sisters have had to wage in the search for TRUTH, JUSTICE AND REDRESS—victims' rights that are denied in my country. To this end, I have granted power of attorney to the law firm of José Alvear Restrepo to represent me in my civil intervention in the government's criminal case.

In 2003, the two hit men were sentenced to 23 years in prison for aggravated homicide of a protected person, since my father was a labor unionist. This weak sentence did not overcome the impunity since the search for those who ordered the murder only got to the point of linking it, in absentia, to a second lieutenant of police by the name of MONROY, who, after the crime, using another instrument of impunity, was retroactively relieved of his post in the month of February, 2001, in an attempt to show that on March 3, 2001, he was no longer an active-duty police officer. However, the criminal proceedings established that my father's murder had been planned in December of 2000.

Officer MONROY was always a fugitive. He was never caught. In August of 2007, he was sentenced to 40 years in prison for homicide against the unionist JORGE DARIO HOYOS FRANCO. This fact was publicized by the Colombian government as a great stride for justice, and perhaps it would have been an advance, if not for the fact that I discovered in December of last year, through a simple information request at the national registry of vital statistics, that MONROY died on May 3, 2006. In other words, a dead man was sentenced—one who is still wanted by the prosecutor's office.

Despite the two sentences, in which the Colombian judges have ruled that my father was murdered for being a labor unionist, the prosecutor's office, in order to continue hiding the truth, maintained the hypothesis of a crime of passion up until August of 2008. It took international pressure for the prosecutor's office to acknowledge the truth with respect to the motive for the crime.

I have forgiven my father's perpetrators, but we will continue to demand that the intellectual authors be investigated, as the murder of unionists in Colombia is the result of a systematic government policy. We know there is evidence of other perpetrators, including members of the national army. The investigation remains open, but with no follow-up of the evidence as requested, and no identification of other possible perpetrators.

I am Yessika Hoyos Morales, one of many daughters of Colombian men and women, who like Jorge Darío Hoyos Franco, were murdered with complete impunity. I am not alone. We are not alone. We are brothers and sisters united by hope, by dreams of justice, truth and freedom. We are Sons and Daughters for Remembering and Against Impunity, an organization that sprang from our need to oppose barbarism. With the good fortune of love and solidarity, we have found many older brothers and sisters around the world who keep us going on the path of hope with their encouragement and faith. We know that we are the children of the dreams of justice and equality of our parents, and it is for that very reason that we are ethically and morally obligated to build a great country, where there is respect for life, where there is the right to think, to dissent and to dream.