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Nominated for the Public Eye Award 2006

in the category:

S O C I A L R I G H T S

(Human and Labor Rights)

**Nominated by: Polaris Institute
Ontario/Canada, and International Labor
Rights Fund, Washington DC, USA**

The Coca-Cola Company

Headquarters:	Atlanta, Georgia, USA
Branch of trade:	Soft drinks; the largest beverage company in the world
Turnover / net profit 2004:	US\$ 22 billion / US\$ 4.8 billion
CEO:	Neville Isdell
Owned by:	Publicly-traded corporation
Employees 2004:	50,000
WEF-Participant 2006:	yes

Summary

In cases before U.S. Federal District Court in Florida, the Colombian union SINALTRAINAL and other organizations accuse the Coca-Cola company and its bottling plants in Colombia of complicity with right-wing paramilitaries, which are claimed to have systematically intimidated and murdered union members in bottling plants. SINALTRAINAL calls on the Coca-Cola company to acknowledge the facts and publicly distance itself from the paramilitaries and acts of violence, and to compensate the victims appropriately.

Information on the case and characteristics of irresponsible corporate behavior

In 2004, the Coca-Cola company realized 10% of its turnover in South America (not including Puerto Rico). In Colombia, the company has agreements giving it far-reaching control over the bottling plants Bebidos y Alimentos und Panamco. The bottling plants receive ingredients for Coca-Cola products bottled and distributed in Colombia from the subsidiary Coca-Cola Colombia.

According to the U.S. campaign "Stop Killer Coke," eight union leaders and a manager from Colombia's Coca-Cola bottling plants have been murdered by right-wing paramilitaries since 1989. Furthermore, the paramilitaries are accused of having tortured, kidnapped, and hold in captivity hundreds of other Coke employees and their family members. The situation for the workers and their families in 2005 remains dangerous.

The nominating organizations accuse Coca-Cola of complicity with the paramilitaries, in order to keep production costs as low as possible. For example: In September 1995, the US-citizen Richard Kirby Keilland, owner of Bebidas y Alimentos, hired Ariost Milan Mosquera to run the plant. Mosquera unlawfully fired SINALTRAINAL union leaders and publicly announced that he had requested the paramilitaries to destroy the union. During contract talks, SINALTRAINAL made requests that would provide increased security for threatened union members and require that

Mosquera end his contacts with paramilitaries. Kirby Keilland, who took part in the negotiations, rejected the request.

In response, SINALTRAINAL started a national campaign in August 1996 against Bebidas y Alimentos, Panamco Colombia and Coca-Cola Colombia. In December 1996, paramilitaries murdered union leader Isidro Segundo Gil at the entrance to the Bebidas y Alimentos plant. The paramilitaries threatened other union members with a similar fate, and burned down the union office in Carepa. On the following day, the workers were led by the paramilitaries into the manager office of Coca-Cola, where they were forced to resign from the union.

In 2001, the Colombian union SINALTRAINAL was able to file suit in Federal District Court in Florida against Coca-Cola and its partners in Colombia, with the help of the U.S. United Steel Workers of America and the International Labor Rights Fund. The judge removed Coca-Cola from the lawsuit in 2003, on the grounds that the links between the company and the aforementioned firms in Colombia were too weak. Nonetheless, the process against Bebidas y Alimentos and Panamco continues. SINALTRAINAL filed an amendment to the lawsuit in 2004, thus resuming the process against the Coca-Cola company.

Consequences

Coca-Cola benefits from the repressive and civil war-like environment in Colombia and does nothing to protect its workers. In several occasions Coca-Cola has even collaborated with right-wing paramilitaries and thus contributed to the climate of violence. Furthermore Coca-Cola and its partners in Colombia have taken legal action against the plaintiffs in Federal District Court in Florida

Current status and demands

SINALTRAINAL has several demands of the beverage concern, including:

1. Coca-Cola must acknowledge the facts brought before the court, such as the murder of Isidro Segundo Gil in the Bebidas y Alimentos bottling plant.
2. Coca-Cola must publicly denounce violence aimed at the union. In addition, the company must let the paramilitaries know that their punishable actions are not in the interest of the Colombian economy.
3. Coca-Cola must rehire union members who were forced to flee because of massive intimidation, and provide a safe environment for the union in the bottling plants.
4. Coca-Cola must drop the retaliatory suit against the plaintiffs in Federal District Court in Florida.
5. Coca-Cola must compensate the victims of the violence adequately.

Detailed nomination: www.publiceye.ch/nominierungen

Further information and links:

- www.LaborRights.org
- www.polarisinstitute.org

The deadline for the submission of the nominations was August 26th 2005. Later developments were considered in the summaries as far as known. 2