

**INTERNATIONAL
LONGSHORE &
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AFL-CIO



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April 22, 2010

The Honorable Barack Obama
President, United States of America
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

President Obama:

I am writing to you about a matter of grave concern to the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) and dockworkers and labor worldwide. As I write this letter, the Costa Rican Government is implementing a deliberate plan to destroy SINTRAJAP, the dockworkers union in the Ports of Limón and Moín.

Two years ago the Costa Rican Government took a \$72.5 million loan from the World Bank to finance the rehabilitation of the city of Limón and the modernization of its port. At the time, President Óscar Arias Sánchez stated that the World Bank loan would be used to fund The City-Port Limón Project with the ultimate goal of improving the quality of life for Limón's residents. Limón is one of the poorest provinces in Costa Rica, and its small population includes multiple generations of unionized dockworkers and their family members. For these individuals, who make up an integral part of the local community, the recent unconstitutional and undemocratic conduct of the Costa Rican Government, which is being carried out with World Bank funds and the tacit support of the United States Government, has potentially ruinous consequences.

The Costa Rican Government is carrying out a plan to undermine and eventually eliminate the dockworkers union in order to privatize the ports of Limón and Moín. In January, JAPDEVA, the state-owned agency that administers the ports of Costa Rica, unilaterally imposed a new employer-run union by removing the democratically elected leadership of SINTRAJAP and replacing them with a government-backed board of directors. When the Union's members refused to allow the sham board of directors, who were backed by police officers, to take control of SINTRAJAP's office building, the Costa Rican Government froze SINTRAJAP's bank accounts in an apparent attempt to cripple the Union. As we understand the situation today, the ports have been militarized



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and there is a general sense that President Arias will seek to finally and decisively take over SINTRAJAP before he leaves office on May 8, 2010.

In this climate of repression, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton made a trip to Costa Rica on March 4, 2010, sat with the Costa Rican President, and spoke these words: "Costa Rica is a champion for the values and goals that we all share". Secretary of State Clinton explained that the Pathways to Prosperity ministerial meeting that she was attending that day was "a forum for nations committed to democracy and open markets to share best practices and smart ideas for promoting social and financial inclusion and widening the circle of inclusive prosperity." While on her trip to Costa Rica, various Costa Rican trade unions presented United States officials with a detailed report of the recent abuses against dockworkers by the Costa Rican Government.

Labor unions and their affiliates worldwide have condemned the conduct of the Costa Rican Government as illegal, undemocratic, and unconstitutional. The ILWU, which represents 25,000 dockworkers on the West Coast of the United States and in Hawaii, Alaska, and British Columbia, has met with a delegation of dockworkers from SINTRAJAP and is directly involved in supporting the Union's struggle to preserve union democracy in Costa Rica. It is our position that the modernization of the Ports of Limón and Moín cannot take place without the full and democratic participation of SINTRAJAP and its democratically elected leadership.

Just as the integrity of union democracy in Costa Rica is at stake so too is the integrity of the United States Government and the World Bank in Latin America. You cannot promote trade agreements in the Western Hemisphere as mechanisms to encourage countries to provide enforceable labor standards and at the same time stand idly by while the Costa Rican Government ousts the democratically elected leadership of a union, freezes its bank accounts, and militarizes the ports in the build up to a total takeover of the Union in the name of modernization. The United States Government is speaking out of both sides of its mouth.

We request that the United States Government immediately communicate to the Costa Rican Government that its current course of conduct is unacceptable and contrary to Costa Rica's stated commitment to democracy and human rights. We request that the United States Government immediately communicate that despite World Bank funding we do not condone conduct that would be illegal under our own labor laws. We request that you act immediately because SINTRAJAP, one of the last bastions of union democracy in Costa Rica, is faced with imminent government takeover. We request that you act immediately because the quality of life for multiple generations of dockworkers and their families should not be the price of modernization.



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Dockworkers worldwide are of a strong and unique fraternity that transcends nationalism. Cargo vessels and their owners are not dependent on any one country. Neither are dockworkers. An injury to one is an injury to all.

Thank you for your immediate attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robert McEllrath". The signature is stylized and fluid.

Robert McEllrath
International President

cc: Hillary Clinton, United States Secretary of State
Rahm Emanuel, White House Chief of Staff
Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the House
Harry Reid, Senate Majority Leader
Richard Trumka, Secretary-Treasurer, AFL-CIO
Tom Dufresne, President, Canada ILWU
Wesley Furtado, International Vice President, Hawaii ILWU
Richard Hughes, President, International Longshoremen's Association
Harold Daggett, Executive Vice President, International Longshoremen's Association
David Cockroft, General Secretary, International Transportation Workers' Federation
Antolín Goya, General Coordinator, International Dockworkers' Council
Paddy Crumlin, National Secretary, Maritime Union of Australia
Allan Coté, Inlandboatmen's Union of the Pacific
Cecilio Lepe Bautista, General Secretary, Federación Nacional de Trabajadores de Transportes y Maniobras Marítimas y Terrestres
Timothy Brown, President, International Organization of Masters, Mates & Pilots
Gunnar Lundeborg, President, Sailors' Union of the Pacific
Michael Sacco, President, Seafarers International Union of North America
Don Keefe, President, Marine Engineers Beneficial Association
SINTRAJAP