

November 17, 2004

General Colin L. Powell, Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C St., NW
Washington, DC 20520
Fax: 202-647-2283

Dear Secretary Powell:

We, members of the InterReligious Task Force, are outraged that a U.S. citizen and trade union leader, Mr. Gilberto Soto, was assassinated in Usulután, El Salvador, on November 5. Two men shot Mr. Soto in the back, at close range, before fleeing to a waiting car. There was no attempt to rob Mr. Soto, and according to eye witness accounts, it was clear that the sole intent was to kill him. We strongly believe that Mr. Soto was assassinated to prevent his meeting with exploited port drivers to initiate a union organizing campaign.

Mr. Soto, who was born in El Salvador, was a longtime union organizer with the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, in charge of working with port drivers on the northeast coast of the United States. Mr. Soto was in Central America to meet with port workers and the drivers who haul containers for the Maersk shipping line and other companies in El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua. The container drivers in El Salvador work under very abusive conditions, forced to work excessively long shifts for little pay. The Salvadoran drivers are also systematically denied their legal right to freedom of association. Any attempt to organize would assuredly be met with mass firings.

We strongly urge you to:

- demand that the president of El Salvador conduct an immediate and thorough investigation into Gilberto Soto's assassination
- make available sufficient U.S. resources and personnel to monitor this investigation
- investigate the systematic violation of labor rights faced by El Salvador's port workers —especially in light of the pending Central America Free Trade Agreement.

If a U.S. citizen and union leader can be assassinated in El Salvador, one can only imagine the repression and threats the Salvadoran workers must face on a daily basis.

Thank you for your efforts to see that genuine justice is done for Mr. Soto and his family, and for all who value respect for fundamental human and workers' rights.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai, Coordinator

cc: Elías Antonio Saca González, President of the Republic ~ fax: 011-503-281-0018
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Senator George Voinovich, US Senate ~ via email: Daniel_knezevic@voinovich.senate.gov
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The following people hereby urge you to take action on this matter as indicated in this letter.