

# COLOMBIA

## Important victories for flower workers

During the spring of 2008, IRTF collected dozens of petition signatures and faxed RRN letters to Colombian officials, Dole Fresh Foods, and Spectrum Flowers because of abuses at various flower plantations.

**Workers began receiving death threats** soon after forming a union at the Bochica plantation in January 2008. (Miami-based Spectrum Flowers is the sole distributor of Bochica flowers.) Because of pressure from the company and death threats by Black Eagles paramilitaries, only seven union workers remained at the plantation by April.

When IRTF hosted a worker justice tour in April 2008, Untrafragancia **union secretary Dora Acero told NE Ohioans about abuses at Dole-owned/operated plantations.** Like many large transnational corporations, Dole has been busting unions. In November 2004, workers formed a union at Dole's largest flower plantation and immediately faced an anti-union campaign that culminated in October 2006 when the company announced it would shut down most of the plantation operations. More than 1,000 workers lost their jobs, even though 90% of Dole's other Colombian plantations—where there are no union drives—remain operational.

## Good News! Independent unions sign contracts

IRTF sent pages and pages of petition signatures to David DeLorenzo, President and CEO of Dole Foods, urging Dole to recognize independent unions—namely Untrafragancia and Sintrasplendor—and promptly negotiate fair contracts to address workers' concerns.

**Now there's victory for the workers!** In late July 2008 there have been more victories in the Colombian flower sector than in the past four years! A new flower union received legal recognition at Flores Papagayo, and workers at two other plantations signed *the only agreements held by Dole flower workers* in Colombia. After years of organizing, **these are just the second and third contracts to be signed by independent unions in the Colombian flower sector.**

- ✓ **Splendor El Rosal plantation:** contract includes important improvements in wages and working conditions. Dole had closed the larger of the two Splendor plantations in October 2006, decimating the strongest independent union in the industry. After pressure from the international solidarity community, the Colombian government agreed to force Dole to arbitration for the remaining plantation. .. Among the benefits negotiated are a **\$200-\$400 bonus** for not having received a salary increase in two years, a **raise of \$14 above the legal minimum** (bringing most flower workers to a monthly salary of about \$215), and improvements in vacation and sick time.
- ✓ **Fragancia plantation:** negotiated by Untrafragancia union, the contract includes a 6% wage increase, bonuses for punctuality, additional pay for fumigation workers who are exposed to hazardous chemicals, and an education stipend so that flower workers can send their children to school.



The growing strength of worker organizations in the Colombian flower sector—and international solidarity by USLEAP, IRTF and more—give us hope for more victories to come!