



Free and fair elections in Colombia?

Bay Area Group to Organize International Observers

Colombia will hold national elections for members of congress early next year at a time when the government is rife with scandals. Over the last year, more than 83 members of the Colombian national congress have been indicted for affiliation with illegal paramilitary organizations financed by the drug trade. The disgraced members, mainly from the governing coalition of President Alvaro Uribe, represented a third of Colombia's House and Senate seats. The penetration by paramilitary groups into the government heightens concerns for a free and fair election process in 2010.

Global Exchange was asked by an association of prominent academics, research centers, human rights groups, Afro-Colombian and Indigenous rights groups and three labor federations to organize an international observation mission to visit, monitor and report on election fairness issues before and during the election cycle beginning in late Nov, and during the run-up to the elections in March 2010. They will also field team of observers during the March 14 election.

This is occurring as a proposed Free Trade agreement between Colombia, the US and Canada hangs in the balance and the controversial US plan to expand military capacity in Colombia is being decided.



Ted Lewis, director of human rights programs at Global Exchange will discuss the role of the election international observer missions in Colombia in the context of violence, mass displacement, and the presence of armed illegal actors. He will have just returned from Colombia where he will be part of the effort to advise the national and international media, the US embassy and other diplomats about the observer mission.

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