

# Stop killer Coca-Cola: People's Tribunal prepares verdict in Colombia

By LeiLani Dowell, Bogotá, Colombia

July 21—U. S. activists, including two members of F.I.S.T., on a delegation organized by the U.S./Cuba Labor Exchange and the International Action Center, joined 1,700 others here today for the opening of the Permanent People's Tribunal in Colombia.

This third and final session of the tribunal, which meets from July 21-23, is examining the role of multinational corporations, with the assistance of the Colombian government and paramilitary organizations, in the extreme repression of Colombian social movements, including trade unions, students, Indigenous and peasants.

Participants from around the globe will hear testimony from survivors, lawyers and researchers over the next three days.

Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, an Argentinean and 1980 Nobel Peace Prize winner, is presiding over the panel of judges who will examine the evidence brought before the tribunal.

Prior hearings have examined how foreign-owned agribusinesses have affected farmers and Indigenous peoples; the mining oil companies' role; the impact of transnational corporate-controlled development on biodiversity and the environment; and oil companies and human rights violations.

In addition to the repression— including massacres, kidnappings, disappearances and death threats—other abuses to

the Colombian people have been noted, such as the elimination of whole Indigenous communities, destruction of the country's biodiversity and the control of prices through speculation.

Testimony was presented today by Sinaltrainal, the National Union of Food Industry Workers, on the persecution of trade unionists by the Coca-Cola and Nestlé corporations. Other speakers represented the Miners

Federation of the Bolivarian South, the National Union of Public Service Workers, the National Indigenous Organization of Colombia, the "Jose Alvear Restrepo" Lawyers' Collective and more.

On July 22, tribunal participants will participate in a march and then hear presentations from representatives of Bolivia, Venezuela and Ecuador—showing that the phenomenon of exploitation by the multinational corporations extends throughout Latin America.

In a show of solidarity with the tribunal, simultaneous actions will be held the same day throughout the U.S. Amy Velez, an organizer of Comuner@s, a grassroots organization of Colombians living in the U.S., says her group is working throughout New York City to



FIST comrade LeiLani Dowell, second from left, and Berta Joubert-Ceci, far right, with Colombian flower workers.

organize for an event on July 22.

Velez told the International Action Center, "For at least a few hours on Tuesday, we will be showing our utmost solidarity with our sisters and brothers in Colombia. We will be assembling in front of the offices of Coca-Cola because of the documented role that Coca-Cola is playing with the death squads in Colombia. These death squads not only kill our brothers and sisters but they work with Coke to break up unions."

The delegation of U.S. activists will remain in Colombia after July 23 to conduct interviews with workers and members of various social movements, with the goal of returning to the U.S. to help build the movement in solidarity with Colombia.

## Youth Unemployment (continued from page 1)

in youth unemployment most acutely. According to a recent study published by Northeastern University's Center for Labor Market Studies, Black and Latin@ youth are suffering real unemployment rates well over 80 percent. The CLMS research study concluded that "low income Black and Hispanic teens face the equivalent of a Great Depression."

Overall, youth unemployment is the highest it has been in more than six decades, according to the CLMS. It found that only 37 percent of U.S. youth are actually employed.

According to the report, the highest youth unemployment rates are in the major U.S. cities. Washington, D.C., has the highest youth unemployment rate at 86 percent. New York City, Detroit and Chicago all have youth unemployment rates over 80 percent.

The spike in unemployment could not come at a worse time for working-class young people in the U.S., as it is occurring at the same time that relatively low-cost student loans are disappearing. The continuing crisis in the financial markets has sent interest rates skyrocketing on student loans. An increasing number of working-class youth, particularly those who go to community colleges, cannot get access to student loans at all.

Since March, nearly 100 lenders have suspended their participation in federally backed fixed-rate loan programs, according to the National Association for Student Financial Aid Administrators. Many more of the fixed-rate loans that low-income students are counting on to finance this coming term are likely to become unavailable in the coming months. Working-class students seeking loans for school are facing what amounts to a form of 21st-century redlining, that is, an automatic and prejudicial rejection.

On July 28 the Massachusetts Educational Financing Authority—which secures more than \$500 million in student loans for more than 40,000 students—announced that it was shutting down lending operations for the 2008/2009 school year. MEFA cited deteriorating conditions in global capital markets as the reason for the shutdown.

## Georgians denounce Saakashvili's aggression

Once more Georgia was launched into a situation of chaos and bloodshed. A new fratricidal war exploded with renewed strength on Georgian soil.

To our great disappointment, the alerts of the Georgian Peace Committee and of progressive personalities of Georgia on the pernicious character of the militarization of the country and on the danger of a pro-fascist and nationalist policy had no effect.

The authorities of Georgia once again organized a bloody war, feeling the support of some Western countries and of regional and international organizations. It will take decades to cleanse the shame poured by the current holders of the power over the Georgian people.

The Georgian army—armed and trained by U.S. instructors and using also U.S. armaments—subjected the city of Tskhinvali to a barbaric destruction. The bombings killed Ossetian civilians, our brothers and sisters, children, women and elderly people. Over 2,000 inhabitants of Tskhinvali and of its surroundings died.

Hundreds of civilians of Georgian nationality also died, both in the conflict zone as well as in the entire territory of Georgia.

As many of the largest and most integral financial institutions in the U.S. continue to barrel toward insolvency, the subsequent credit contraction has spread to every debt market from mortgage loans to auto loans to student loans.

The utter absurdity of an economic system that makes access to education dependent on the profit margins of Wall Street is daily becoming more apparent. The need to intensify the struggle for free and universal education and more jobs for young people has never been greater. With no jobs and no money for the coming school year, this summer has been hot and miserable for millions of young people. It's time to turn up the heat on the student lenders, bankers and bosses. ■

The Georgian Peace Committee expresses its deep condolences to the relatives and friends of those who have perished.

The entire responsibility for this fratricidal war, for thousands of children, women and elderly dead people, for the inhabitants of South Ossetia and of Georgia falls exclusively on the current president, on the Parliament and on the government of Georgia. The irresponsibility and the adventurism of the Saakashvili regime have no limits. There is no doubt the president of Georgia and his team are criminals and must be held responsible.

The Georgian Peace Committee, together with all the progressive parties and social movements of Georgia, will struggle to assure that the organizers of this monstrous genocide have a severe and legitimate punishment.

The Georgian Peace Committee declares and asks broad public opinion not to identify the current Georgian leadership with the people of Georgia, with the Georgian nation, and appeals to all to support the Georgian people in the struggle against the criminal regime of Saakashvili.

We appeal to all the political forces of Georgia, the social movements and the people of Georgia to unite in order to free the country from the Russian-phobic and pro-fascist anti-popular regime of Saakashvili!

The Georgian Peace Committee

Tbilisi, Aug. 11, 2008

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### YOUNG PEOPLE DEMAND:

- Free public education at all levels, including job training
- Universal healthcare
- Demilitarization of our schools/ no to police in our high schools
- Right to affordable housing
- Recruiters out of schools
- Stop the raids and deportations
- Dump 'No Child Left Behind'
- Stop foreclosures and evictions
- No more prisons and jails and no to imperialism

