



Chiquita Brands, an American Corporation, Admits Financial Support of Colombian Terrorist Groups

When an American corporation admits to wrongdoing and pays a fine for its role in funneling large amounts of monies to a known terrorist organization which was involved in widespread acts of assault, murder, rape, and intimidation, it is time to step in and battle such a corporation to pursue justice for those victims and families who were deprived of their human rights.

Last year, Chiquita Brands International, Inc., admitted paying Colombian terrorist groups for protection in farming regions viciously fought over by leftist rebels and far-right paramilitary organizations. Chiquita also agreed to pay a \$25 million fine in settlement of a lengthy U. S. Department of Justice investigation of the matter. The protection money was paid by Chiquita to the violent right-wing terrorist organization, United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia ("Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia," or AUC), and to other terrorist organizations, including the left-wing Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). AUC has been reported to be responsible for some of Colombia's most gruesome crimes and for a significant part of the country's cocaine exports. The U. S. Department of State officially declared AUC a "foreign terrorist organization" beginning October 2001, and the charges against Chiquita began at that time. Prior to this time, however, payments to these organizations had been made by the company for years.

Chiquita, based in Cincinnati, Ohio, said that the motive behind the payments was to protect their workers. Reports show, however, that during the period of time that Chiquita was providing substantial funding for the terrorist organizations, thousands of Colombian workers were being killed, raped, and intimidated by these same paramilitary groups. The Christian Science Monitor reported in April 2007 that Colombia's chief prosecutor, Mario Iguaran, said, "This was not payment of extortion money. It was support for an illegal armed group whose

methods included murder." The Monitor also reported that in the same year that AUC was declared a terrorist organization, the Organization of American States had reported that thousands of rifles and millions of rounds of ammunition were unloaded at a Colombian port by Banadex, a subsidiary of Chiquita.

SDSBS is well aware of what happens when corporations put profits before safety. These are not just numbers. Each story involves a person – a father, mother, brother, child, husband or wife – savagely slaughtered, mercilessly tortured, or violently raped by mercenaries who were supported by millions of dollars in funding from this corporation. Through the American justice system, we have served notice to these corporations that their exploitation and reckless endangerment of workers will not be tolerated. Thanks to a well-established legal precedent, this protection extends to everyone, Americans and non-Americans alike, whose lives have been devastated by an American corporation doing wrong. **Jack Scarola** has put together a team of investigators and attorneys who are meeting with victims and their families on a monthly basis and will continue to do so until we can, together, put a stop to the support that American corporations provide to terrorist organizations. ■

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