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International Centre for Trade Union Rights

Centro Internacional para los Derechos Sindicales
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ICTUR was founded to
defend and extend trade union rights and
to raise awareness of these rights and their violations
around the world

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Attn:

President Nicolas Maduro
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CC:

Rafael Ramírez Carreño, Permanent Representative of the Bolivarian
Republic of Venezuela to the United Nations, New York

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Dear President Maduro,

The International Centre for Trade Union Rights is gravely concerned
about the recent murders of two trade unionists in Venezuela.

ICTUR understands that on 13 March 2017, Joel Alcalá, a trade union
official at the state enterprise Bauxilum, was shot dead in Puerto Ordaz,
Ciudad Guayana. Joel Alcalá was until 2015 the Secretary General of
the Sindicato Único de Trabajadores de la Industria de la Alúmina,
Bauxita y sus Derivados (Sutralúmina).

On 22 April 2017, trade union leader Esmín Ramírez was kidnapped in
San Felix, and was found shot dead on 23 April in Ciudad Guayana.
Ramírez was an active member of the Movement 21 labour syndicate at
the state enterprise Ferrominera.

ICTUR welcomes reports that a criminal investigation has been
initiated into the murder of Ramírez. It is not clear whether the murder
of Alcalá is currently under investigation.

Fundamental rights – especially those relating to human life and
personal safety – must be fully respected and guaranteed in order for
the rights and freedoms association enshrined in the International
Labour Organisation Conventions 87 and 98 to be exercised. Venezuela
has ratified all of the fundamental ILO Conventions.

The ILO's Committee on Committee on Freedom of Association has clearly stated that the rights of workers can only be "exercised in a climate that is free from violence, pressure or threats of any kind against the leaders and members of these organizations, and it is for governments to ensure that this principle is respected" (*Digest of decisions and principles of the Freedom of Association Committee of the Governing Body of the ILO*, Fifth Edition, 2006, paras. 42-45). The Committee has further noted that an independent judicial inquiry should be instituted immediately to investigate assaults on the physical or moral integrity of individuals, in order to determine responsibility, punish those responsible and prevent repetition (*ILO Digest*, paras. 46, 50, 184, 191). The killing of trade unionists requires the "institution of independent judicial inquiries in order to shed full light, at the earliest date, on the facts and the circumstances in which such actions occurred and in this way, to the extent possible, determine where responsibilities lie, punish the guilty parties and prevent the repetition of similar events." Failure to hold guilty parties to account creates a culture of impunity, "which reinforces the climate of violence and insecurity, and which is extremely damaging to the exercise of trade union rights" (*ILO Digest*, paras. 42-44, 46, 48 and 52).

ICTUR therefore calls on the government to promptly investigate the circumstances around the murders of Joel Alcalá and Esmin Ramírez, to determine responsibility, and to hold those responsible to account. ICTUR further calls on the government to undertake all necessary measures to ensure the fundamental freedoms of workers to join and form unions and to take action in defence of their interests. ICTUR will report these incidents in the journal *International Union Rights*, which was established in 1993, and which enjoys a readership in more than 100 countries.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Blackburn', followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Daniel Blackburn, Director