By e-mail: 
correo@presidencia.gob.ve
misionvenezuelaonu@gmail.com

Attn: 
President Nicolas Maduro
Final Avenida Urdaneta
Esq. de Bolero, Palacio de Miraflores Caracas, Distrito Capital
Republic of Venezuela

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

May 2017

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 Esmin Ramírez was kidnapped in San Felix, and was found shot dead on 23 April in Cuidad 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 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,

Daniel Blackburn, Director