

# *Coca-Cola Accused of Funding Colombian Death Squad*

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Bogota, September 2 (RHC)-- U.S.-based Coca-Cola company along with more than 50 other companies were accused by Colombian courts of financing terrorism for their ties to the now disbanded paramilitary organization, United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia, a fact trade union leaders have been denouncing for decades.

The cases against the companies will be heard in a transitional justice tribunal after the peace deal with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia and the government is signed.

Coca-Cola was accused of hiring hitmen from the AUC between 1990 and 2002 to kill at least 10 labor union leaders who were trying to organize Coca-Cola's plants. U.K. oil company BP has also be taken to court for its funding of AUC, along with kidnapping and human rights abuses.

Other companies suspected of financing terrorism, commonly referred to as the "para-economy," include Colombia's largest beverage company Postobon, cement company Cementos Argos, state oil company Ecopetrol and banana distributor Chiquita Brands International.

In June, families of victims killed by paramilitary groups opened a federal lawsuit against Chiquita in the U.S. for supporting the AUC. The company was estimated to have made at least 100 payments to the group worth \$1.7 million between 1997 and 2004.

The right-wing AUC coalition, deemed a terrorist organization by the Colombian government, disbanded in 2006. The paramilitary group was responsible for a number of massacres, human rights abuses, kidnappings and extortion, which resulting in the displacement of thousands of Colombians.

Some politicians and authorities have been sentenced in relation to links with the AUC, the majority of businesses involved have not been punished for their illegal financial activities.

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