

Colombia and Brazil among ten worst countries for workers' rights in 2019



Geneva, July 6 (RHC)-- Colombia and Brazil are among the ten worst countries for workers' rights in 2019, according to the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) Global Rights Index.

“More and more governments are complicit in facilitating labor exploitation because workers are forced to work in the informal sector of the economy,” General Secretary of the ITUC Sharan Burrow explained, adding that “the number of countries which exclude workers from the right to establish or join a trade union increased from 92 in 2018 to 107 in 2019.”

The sixth edition of ITUC index ranks 145 countries against 97 internationally recognized indicators to assess where workers' rights are best protected in law and in practice. The confederation represents 207 million workers in 163 countries and territories across the globe.

According to their 2019 report, the ten worst countries for workers' rights in 2019 are Algeria, Bangladesh, Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala, Kazakhstan, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Zimbabwe, in no specific order.

“Trade unions are on the front lines in a struggle to claim democratic rights and freedoms from the corporate greed that has captured governments such that they act against workers’ rights,” Burrow said. Brazil, Colombia, and Guatemala also appear on the list of deadliest countries for labor leaders.

Colombia remains the deadliest for workers and union members with 34 assassinations in 2018, 10 attempted murders and 172 recorded cases of threats to life. Of the recorded murders, ten were members of the Unitary National Federation of Agricultural Trade Unions and 13 were teachers, a 126 percent increase from the 15 assassinations in 2017.

The country's largest union the Unitary Central Union of Colombian Workers (CUT) said that under President Ivan Duque “Colombia continues its anti-union policy, violation of freedom of association, attacks on the peace process, breach of labor commitments demanded by the international community and the assassination of social leaders.”

Meanwhile, the situation of workers in Brazil is no better off. Since far-right president Jair Bolsonaro rose to power, the situation has dramatically worsened with the adoption of regressive laws that severely undermined collective rights.

The rate of unemployment in Brazil is rising with over three million Brazilians reported still without work after at least two years, new data from the Institute of Applied Economic Research (Ipea) reveals, as the economy also has reached record low figures.

Bolsonaro's social security reform bill, which he says will restore public finances, seeks to raise the minimum retirement age and workers' contributions. It also includes provisions that eliminate labor protections for pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers.

According to the ITUC report, Brazil entered the ten worst list for the first time with the adoption of such regressive laws, violent repression of strikes and protest and threats and intimidation of union leaders.

Another Latin American country on the list is Guatemala, which remains affected by endemic violence against trade union leaders, compounded by a climate of impunity. In addition, many private companies, such as Bimbo, resorted to union-busting practices and anti-union dismissals.

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