



Construction Forestry Mining & Energy Union

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29 September 2009

The Hon B O'Connor MP
Minister for Home Affairs
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Minister

I write to express concern in respect of two articles that have appeared in The Australian newspaper in respect of the arrest and charges against Colombian trade unionist Lilianny Obando. Attached are the two articles. The allegations made in respect of the CFMEU have no substance.

It is difficult to determine who has provided this information to this journalist. However, I suspect there is a good prospect that someone in the federal police and/or ASIO are involved in the off the record briefing of the journalist. The aim of the articles is to denigrate a number of MPs, trade unionists, trade unions and solidarity groups that have been active in solidarity work in respect of the appalling human rights situation in Colombia.

I have been advised by Ms Lilianny Obando that she felt intimidated by the visit of the federal police from Australia. She thought also that the visit was part of a campaign to attack Australian trade unionists and MPs who have supported the struggle for human rights in Colombia. It seems highly inappropriate for this type of visit to occur without the legal representative of Lilianny Obando having been contacted. Also I am advised that the police officer (DAS) did not provide his correct name at the attempted interview with Lilianny Obando. We understand that the interpreter at the attempted interview, Diana Plaza, also did not identify herself.

Your response and advise in respect of these matters will be appreciated.

Yours faithfully

ANDREW FERGUSON
State Secretary.

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AFP probes Colombian rebel links

Bernard Lane | September 19, 2009

Article from: [The Australian](#)

AN Australian Federal Police agent visited high-profile Colombian prisoner Liliany Obando in a Bogota women's jail on September 2, in pursuit of local ties to Marxist guerillas known as FARC.

The agent pressed Obando for details of trips she made to Australia in 2005 and 2007, as a representative of the farm workers' peak union body Fensuagro.

Details of the visit were confirmed yesterday by her lawyer, Eduardo Matias.

It is understood Obando refused to answer questions put to her by the agent and complained that the visit was illegal.

Neither the AFP nor Colombian authorities would comment.

Obando is charged with "rebellion" against the state and covert offshore fundraising for the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), which has waged a 40-year guerilla war against the government and is regarded as a terrorist group.

Her public trial is imminent.

During her visits to Australia, she gave talks and met politicians including Labor MP Laurie Ferguson and the Australian Greens' Lee Rhiannon, as well as trade union leaders.

Her pitch was that Colombia's centre-right government and paramilitary groups were murdering trade unionists and abusing human rights.

Mr Ferguson and Ms Rhiannon said they were surprised by the charges against Obando and did not recall her fundraising.

In March last year, Colombian forces raided a FARC camp in Ecuador, killed the group's second in command, Raul Reyes, and carried off his computers, the files of which, according to Colombian authorities, showed that FARC had a far more extensive overseas network than suspected.

In August last year, Obando became the first Colombian to be arrested as a result of the computer archive.

Using code names, she had emailed Reyes about forums and events in Australia and other countries, reporting "mission completed", according to Colombia's El Tiempo newspaper.

Obando is reported to have made 35 trips abroad between 2003 and last year.

Colombian authorities allege that soon after Reyes's death, she attempted to wipe from her computer details of activities and contacts in Australia and Canada.

They claim she is a member of FARC's international commission, which was entrusted with propaganda and fundraising through front organisations.

Obando did raise a modest sum of money for FARC during a trip to Sydney in September-October 2007, according to Colombian intelligence sources quoted in the Colombian press.

NSW co-ordinator of the group Peace and Justice for Colombia, Elizabeth Rivera, said there had been plans to tap trade unions and political parties for money towards Fensuagro's human rights work in Colombia, but these had come to nothing, partly because of Obando's arrest.

She said Colombia's Uribe government hoped to "make an example" of Obando.

"She came and showed us what really happens (to trade unionists and peasants) in Colombia," Ms Rivera said.

"Anybody that goes out of the country to speak against the (Uribe) government would have probably 100 per cent chance that when they come back, they would be taken (prisoner)."

Ms Rivera had no concern that money raised in Australia for Obando's legal defence might end up with FARC because "we will send it to the solicitors".

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