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Steelworkers File NAFTA Labor Complaint Against Mexico

Washington, D.C. - The United Steelworkers (USW) today charged that the government of Mexico violated the NAFTA labor side agreement when it removed the leader of the National Mineworkers' Union from office.

In a complaint filed with the U.S. Department of Labor under the North American Agreement on Labor Cooperation (NAALC), the USW accuses Mexican labor authorities of violating both Mexican and international law when they withdrew legal recognition from the Mexican union leader, Napoleon Gómez Urrutia, in February. The USW also accuses Mexico of failing to carry out safety inspections at the Pasta de Conchos mine, where an explosion killed 65 mineworkers on February 17.

"The Mexican government saw Napoleon Gómez as a threat because he fought successfully for higher wages, because he engaged in international solidarity, and because he challenged the government-controlled labor federations," said Steelworkers president Leo Gerard. "They decided to use any means necessary to eliminate that threat."

The USW, which represents 850,000 industrial workers in the United States and Canada, signed a solidarity pact with the Mexican Mineworkers in 2004. In 2005, the Mexican union supported a strike by copper miners in Arizona against Group Minero Mexico, a Mexican multinational company.

Gerard vowed that the Steelworkers and the international labor movement would continue to put pressure on Mexico's incoming president, Felipe Calderón, to respect international labor law and end the government's interference in the Mineworkers union. "If Calderon decides to be more reasonable than [outgoing president Vicente] Fox, good. If not, we are going to be his worst nightmare."

The conflict between the government and the union, whose members continue to support Gómez, continues to feed the climate of political uncertainty in Mexico. In April, government security forces fired on striking union members, killing two workers.

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