

CHIQUITA: THE GUNS AND DRUGS AND UNION KILLING CNN DIDN'T MENTION

CNN has a report today on some of the many lawsuits victims of right and left wing violence have taken against Chiquita.

Family members of thousands of Colombians who were killed or who disappeared are suing Chiquita Brands International, alleging the produce company is liable because of its payments to paramilitaries."We're holding them accountable," said Paul Wolf, a Washington-based attorney who is handling cases for family members of more than 2,000 victims.

[snip]

A federal judge in Florida is weighing whether the lawsuits, which constitute more than 4,000 claims against Chiquita, will go to trial.

I'm glad CNN has called attention to the suits. But I wanted to point out some of the important details, including the following details from a suit filed last March.

There's the way Chiquita helped the right wing AUC import 3000 AK-47s.

In 2001, Chiquita facilitated the clandestine and illegal transfer of arms and ammunition from Nicaragua to the AUC.

[snip]

Instead of docking in Panama, the Otterloo [a ship registered in Panama and carrying 3000 AK-47s] instead went

to Turbo, Colombia, where Chiquita, through Banadex, operated a private port facility for the transport of bananas and other cargo.

After the Otterloo docked at Chiquita's port in Turbo, Banadex employees unloaded crates containing the assault rifles and ammunition. On information and belief, the AUC, which had free access to the port, then loaded these rifles onto AUC vehicles and took possession of them.

And there's the way Chiquita helped the AUC export coke.

Colombian prosecutors have charged that the AUC shipped drugs on Chiquita's boats carrying bananas to Europe.

[snip]

More than one and a half tons of cocaine have been found hidden in Defendant's produce, valued at over 33 million dollars. Two of the ships on which drugs were found were named the Chiquita Bremen and the Chiquita Belgie.

And finally, there's the way Chiquita relied on AUC to break the unions.

After its agreement with Chiquita, the AUC understood that one goal of its campaign of terror was to force laborers to work in the plantations. Anyone who disobeyed the order knew what would happen to them. For example, one individual who worked in Chiquita's offices at a plantation in Urabá, was present when paramilitaries arrived at the plantation and summarily executed a banana worker who had been seen as a troublemaker because his slow work held up the production line. Another individual saw paramilitaries arrive to

threaten banana workers after a salary dispute.

[snip]

In addition to directly suppressing labor activity, the paramilitaries regulated the banana-growing population and protected Chiquita's profitability by controlling the provision of medical services in the towns of Urabá.

Residents of Apartadó reported that they feared seeing doctors because they believed that medical personnel were under the control of the AUC. On information and belief, this arrangement benefited Chiquita because it allowed the paramilitaries to inform the company of its employees' medical issues that could potentially affect labor productivity, including pregnancy.

Whether or not this suit goes forward (and new documents released in April by National Security Archive make it clear that Chiquita considered their ties to terrorist groups a quid pro quo), it's important to document what it means when corporations team up with terrorist organizations.

Obama wants to extend "free" trade with Colombia, when it's not all that clear that these practices have ended.