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## NEW STUDY SHOWS PATTERN OF LABOR RIGHTS VIOLATIONS THROUGHOUT CENTRAL AMERICA

US Dept. of Labor Continues to Suppress Similar Study by Labor Rights Watchdog

On the eve of the CAFTA debate in Congress, a new study by a respected Costa Rican labor rights organization, Aseprola, details an extensive pattern of labor law violations throughout Central America. The report corroborates an earlier study by the Washington, DC-based International Labor Rights Fund (ILRF) which was commissioned in 2002 by the US Department of Labor (US DOL), completed in 2003, but which the DOL refuses to release. [Aseprola's study and an executive summary are available at [www.laborrights.org](http://www.laborrights.org)]

Although ILRF is prohibited by US DOL from discussing the contents of its report, the organization's Deputy Director, Bama Athreya, observes that the Costa Rican study, "confirms in every respect our earlier findings."

"We are releasing the Aseprola study today because we believe that the magnitude of the labor rights violations that occur routinely throughout Central America must be remedied before a trade pact like CAFTA can be passed. There is nothing in the proposed trade agreement that deals effectively with this problem," she added.

Aseprola's study, "An Examination of Six Basic Labor Rights," finds widespread and routine labor rights violations including mandatory pregnancy testing as a precondition for employment; endemic child labor; forced overtime with no effective sanctions to end the practice; and the firing of workers who exercise their legal rights to organize unions, with no reinstatement by the courts.

ILRF was awarded a grant from USDOL in 2002 to compile information on labor law implementation in each of the Central American countries. ILRF submitted final reports for clearance to DOL in March 2003. To date DOL has refused clearance of the reports which detail labor law violations in all of the Central American countries.

ILRF filed Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) petitions in December 2004 that requested Office of the US Trade Representative (USTR) review labor law problems and labor rights violations in each of the Central American countries. To date USTR has not responded to the petitions.

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