

As Oil Money Flowed, Clinton Turned Back on Rights Abuses in Colombia: Report

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Then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton speaks with Colombian Vice President Angelino Garzon in January, 2011. In her remarks, Clinton praised Colombia's efforts in "reaching out to civil society to add their voices to a national conversation about human rights and labor rights." (Photo: US State Department/flickr/cc)

A new investigative look at the ties between big business interests in Colombia, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, and her family's charitable foundation are raising troubling questions about the role that corporate trade deals and big oil may have played in softening the powerful Democrat's position on human rights in the South American country.

During her time heading the State Department, presumptive 2016 presidential nominee Clinton stayed silent on reports of violence and threats against labor activists in Colombia, even as her family's "global philanthropic empire" was developing—and benefiting from—private business ties with a major oil corporation accused of worker-intimidation in the country, according to [new reporting](#) published Thursday by *International Business Times*.

In addition, the *IBT* investigation shows that after millions of dollars were pledged by the oil company to the Clinton Foundation, Clinton reversed her position on a U.S.-Colombia trade pact she had previously opposed on the grounds that it was bad for labor rights.

As *IBT* journalists Matthew Cunningham-Cook, Andrew Perez, and David Sirota report:

At the same time that Clinton's State Department was [lauding](#) Colombia's human rights record, her family was forging a financial relationship with Pacific Rubiales, the [sprawling](#) Canadian petroleum company at the center of Colombia's labor strife. The Clintons were also developing commercial ties with the oil giant's [founder](#), Canadian financier Frank Giustra, who now occupies a seat on the [board](#) of the Clinton Foundation, the family's global philanthropic empire.

"The details of these financial dealings remain murky," the article states, "but this much is clear: After millions of dollars were pledged by the oil company to the Clinton Foundation—supplemented by millions more from Giustra himself—Secretary Clinton abruptly changed her position on the controversial U.S.-Colombia trade pact."

What's more, an *IBT* review of public State Department documents shows that "as the Giustra-Clinton foundation relationship deepened, Hillary Clinton and the State Department

never criticized or took action against the Colombian government for alleged violations of labor rights at Pacific Rubiales.”

Quite the opposite, in fact: “Instead, Clinton’s State Department issued certifications in [2009](#), [2010](#), [2011](#) and [2012](#) declaring that Colombia has been complying with human rights standards that are required under federal law for continued U.S. military aid to the country.”

As Clinton courts American labor unions seeking support for her likely presidential campaign, the authors note, “her reversal on the Colombia trade pact and her subsequent move to bless Colombia’s human rights record complicate her efforts to present herself as a champion of worker rights.”

Just this week, justifying its opposition to the looming Trans-Pacific Partnership and Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, the AFL-CIO [pointed out](#) that four years after the U.S. and Colombia signed the Labor Action Plan (LAP) to address entrenched labor rights violations—pushed by Clinton’s State Department in order to diffuse unions’ criticism of the Colombia trade agreement—Colombian workers have suffered over 1,933 threats and acts of violence against unionists. These include 105 alleged assassinations of union activists and 1,337 death threats.

Noting that that there has been virtually no progress over the past year in compliance with the LAP, the labor organization declared:

As the U.S. government negotiates broad trade agreements with Europe and the Pacific Rim, it must look back at the LAP’s continued failure in protecting workers’ rights in Colombia, and not commit the same mistakes. It must ensure that these agreements deliver on the promises made for over twenty years about the broader benefits of expanding trade. Investors and companies have received these benefits. Workers in the U.S. and countries that are our trading partners have not. We deserve it.

[Pointing to remarks](#) she delivered in Hong Kong in 2011, *IBT* notes that Clinton has previously “championed” the TPP.

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