

## **Union Sindical Obrera (USO) Enters Negotiations with Pacific Rubiales Energy**

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Earlier this month, a group of direct employees at Meta Petroleum Corp. – a subsidiary of Pacific Rubiales Energy (PRE) in Puerto Gaitan, Meta – joined Colombian oil sector union USO. On June 16, a list of demands was formally presented and on June, 30 a negotiating committee initiated discussions with Meta Petroleum. Delay tactics employed by the company prevented a productive first session and dates for resumed dialogues are pending.

These are the first negotiations between USO and a PRE subsidiary since controversial labor conflicts in 2011, when USO bargained for dramatically improved labor conditions at subcontracting firms but was subsequently forced to leave Puerto Gaitan as a result of violence, the introduction of a company union, and the blacklisting of USO's approximately 3,000 members. USO's new members are also its first at a PRE subsidiary since 2011.

A 2013 criminal complaint filed by USO, which documents PRE's systematic violation of its workers' freedom of association, was transferred in May to the human rights branch of the Prosecutor General's Office. As a result of several such reassignments, this investigation has failed to move forward for the past year.

Some 150 workers joined USO several months ago at the Caño Sur field, adjacent to Rubiales, which is operated by Colombia's national oil company Ecopetrol. USO signed a collective bargaining agreement with Ecopetrol in August, 2014 which covers approximately 2,500 direct employees and approximately 20,000 (of 37,109) workers outsourced to intermediary firms. Ecopetrol is among the world's largest 50 oil companies; PRE does not figure within the top 200.

Earlier this year USO led a coalition of unions and members of congress, successfully lobbying Ecopetrol to assume full control of the Rubiales concession in 2016 (where it currently contracts operations to PRE). Rubiales is Colombia's most lucrative oil field, producing 162,000 barrels daily. PRE will maintain exclusive rights to the neighboring Quifa field through 2031, and has discovered significant reserves in its CP0-1, CP0-12, and CP0-14 concessions, also in Puerto Gaitan. Subcontracting firms under PRE employ an estimated 15,000 workers in the region.

Multinational Alfa and US-based Harbor Energy Ltd. offered to buy PRE in May, but a group representing 17% of the company's shareholders has attempted to block the sale, claiming the price is deflated.

USO represents approximately 30,000 members in Colombia's oil and energy sector, and has worked for 92 years to improve the lives of working families and defend the public administration of the country's national resources.