



EMBARGOED UNTIL 10 A.M. EST MARCH 7

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Community Leaders, Workers, Consulates Join With LIUNA to Launch Campaign to Help Immigrant Construction Workers Unite

With Five Powerful Voices, “Levanta Tu Voz” Begins in Metro D.C.

Washington, D.C. (March 7, 2017) – Community leaders, workers and representatives of Latin American consulates joined with LIUNA today at the National Press Club to launch a long-term effort to help immigrant construction workers unite for basic rights and freedoms.

The effort – called *Levanta Tu Voz! (Raise Your Voice!)* – will include grassroots field activity at jobsites and in area community gathering places. It will be accompanied by a high-impact, multi-year paid media campaign, which will amplify the real-life stories of immigrant construction workers.

“For too long immigrants have come to our region and given of their skills and their labor as they seek better lives, only to be violated, abused or discarded,” said Dennis Martire, Vice President and Mid-Atlantic Regional Manager of LIUNA, the Laborers’ International Union of North America. “The only way to change that is for workers to unite in a powerful organization of their own such as LIUNA.”

Julio Palomo, Assistant Business Manager of LIUNA Local 11, said the media campaign will launch with the stories and voices of five workers in the construction sector who have been victims of assault, theft, injuries and discrimination at the hands of their employers.

“Unfortunately their experiences are far too common in the metro D.C. area,” Palomo said.

One worker to be featured in the campaign is Walter Mendez, who was injured on a jobsite. The contractor initially refused to allow medical help. “I cracked my back on the job and the supervisor told me I was not good enough to even pick up the trash,” Mendez said. With LIUNA’s assistance, the contractor took responsibility.

Another, Elda Correas was a victim of fraud, whose employer attempted to cheat her out of more than \$4,500 in pay. She is trained in lead and asbestos removal. “They didn’t pay us what they had told us they were going to pay,” she said. “When we deposited the checks in the bank, they bounced.”

Luis Fonseca, also a trained asbestos and demolition worker with 17 years of experience, was assaulted by his supervisor, resulting in the loss of some vision. “The supervisor punched me in my left eye,” Fonseca said. “I felt like he trampled on my rights, he trampled on my life. I began to think that because I was Hispanic, I had been treated like that.”

Ernesto Martinez, who is also featured in the campaign, was cheated out of overtime pay. “They made us work more than 60 hours a week without being paid overtime,” he said. Through a lawsuit filed by LIUNA, Martinez and his co-workers won thousands of dollars in unpaid overtime.

Hector Rodas shares his experience of being paid less than the legal wage. When he and co-workers began organizing a union, the company threatened them – and retaliated by notifying Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers. “Immigration came to my house at about five-thirty in the morning,” Rodas said. He and his wife were detained. “I felt as if the world had ended. I thought my children would be left without their mother.”

His wife was deported, but by uniting with LIUNA, federal charges of labor law violations were filed and Rodas and his wife were granted U-visas, which gives them legal status due to being victims and witnesses of a crime.

“The voices of this campaign are more than ads,” said Hilda Aguirre, counsel of the Salvadoran Consulate in Washington. “They represent the hopes and struggles of immigrants who have helped make the United States a better nation and can continue to do so if they can unite.”

Gustavo Torres, Executive Director of CASA, a community organization dedicated to low-income immigrant workers, applauded the campaign. “This campaign can shine a light on the need for immigrant workers to unite to not only improve their conditions, but those of all workers,” he said. “The level of violation and abuse that immigrant workers in the construction industry face is shameful. What happens to one can happen to us all. We must raise our voice.”

The workers tell their stories in various formats, which will air on three Spanish-language television networks, four Spanish-language radio stations and across an array of social media and digital platforms. The ads and updates on the campaign can be found at <http://www.LiunaLevantaTuVoz.org>.

The ads are meant to bolster LIUNA’s field effort in which workers and organizers will engage construction laborers on jobsites, in their homes and in the community, about the issues they face and how address them together.

Also attending the National Press Club event were representatives of the consulates of Mexico, Guatemala and Honduras.

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LIUNA’s Mid-Atlantic Region includes more than 40,000 workers predominantly in the construction industry in Pennsylvania, Maryland, West Virginia, the District of Columbia, Virginia and North Carolina.