

Produce company Fyffes has denied any involvement in a recent attack on a union boss at one of its Honduran melon subsidiaries.

U.K.-based nonprofit Banana Link said Moisés Sanchez, general secretary of Union of Workers in Agroindustry and Allied Trades (STAS) general secretary at Melon Export, was attacked by armed assailants who said he would "pay the consequences" unless he ceased his union activities.



Union of Workers in Agroindustry and Allied Trades general secretary Moisés Sanchez

The organization said Sanchez was with his brother Misael when the pair were attacked by a gang of six men earlier this month. Misael was later hospitalized due to a machete wound to his face, while Moisés was abducted and badly beaten, it added.

Banana Link also said his attackers were known hired assassins.

In a statement sent to *Fresh Fruit Portal*, Fyffes distanced itself from any involvement in the incident.

"Fyffes is aware that this attack took place and we hope that the Honduran police will investigate it. We can confirm that the company had no involvement whatsoever with it," the company said.

The nonprofit's national coordinator Jacqui Mackay said consumers and retailers played an important role in helping fight against abuse.

"It is critical that consumers are aware that despite the plethora of ethical commitments that companies make, in many workplaces both here and overseas, employees are still denied their fundamental human rights," she said.

"Most U.K. retailers buy fruit from Fyffes and have a clear responsibility for ensuring that this fruit is planted, picked and packed by workers that can join the union of their choice without fear of repercussions, whether that be losing their job or being attacked and abducted on their way home."

She alleged there was "clear evidence" Fyffes did not engage with unions at the melon subsidiaries in Honduras and did not respect unions as partners in dialogue or bargaining.

"Consumers should demand that all workers employed along Fyffes supply chains are free to join a union and that management engage in constructive meaningful dialogue with these unions, as the independent representatives of their workforce," she said.

"Agriculture is a dangerous sector of employment; workers should be able to join the union of their choice to negotiate for a safe and healthy workplace."

Fyffes was acquired by Japan's Sumitomo Corporation in February, and The Freedom & Fairness for Fyffes Workers campaign has made an appeal to the new owners to address alleged abuse in Honduras and Costa Rica.



Sanchez's brother, Misael, alleged he was attacked with a machete

In March 2016, Banana Link and International Union of food workers (IUF) submitted a complaint to the U.K.'s Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) claiming breaches of the ETI Base Code of Conduct. The alleged breaches included failure to pay a living wage, provide a safe and hygienic workplace and to respect trade union rights.

Mackay said although parts of this complaint were upheld, mediation attempts had so far failed because Fyffes had refused to participate. In May the ETI is expected to rule on whether or not Fyffes is meeting its obligations, she added.

'It is clear that Fyffes' persistent failure to ensure that fundamental workers' rights are respected at Melon Export has created a vehemently anti union culture in which this attack has taken place," she adds.

"We have documented the failure to enable workers to exercise their rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining at other Fyffes subsidiaries and suppliers.

"Until this changes we fear for the safety of the women and men who bravely defend the rights of their fellow workers."

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