

**Comité Pro Uno \* Hermandad Mexicana \* Pilipino Workers Center \* Transnational  
Institute for Grassroots Research and Action**

**CONTACT:** Debayani Kar, (202) 246-8143, [debi.kar@gmail.com](mailto:debi.kar@gmail.com)  
Martha Ugarte, (818) 398-2578, [martha.ugarte@hotmail.com](mailto:martha.ugarte@hotmail.com)  
David Villalobos, (559) 303-0221, [dsilvavillalobos@yahoo.com.mx](mailto:dsilvavillalobos@yahoo.com.mx)

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**Website:** [www.boycottwesternunion.net](http://www.boycottwesternunion.net); **UserID:** tigma, **Password:** testingweb

## **Immigrant Groups to Launch Western Union Boycott**

Los Angeles, CA – On September 10, Los Angeles area immigrant and community organizations will join the Transnational Institute for Grassroots Research and Action (TIGRA) to launch a nationwide boycott against Colorado-based money transfer giant Western Union. This boycott comes two days before a general consumer boycott by immigrants. Groups accuse Western Union of charging exorbitant fees while failing to adequately reinvest in immigrant communities. A year's worth of negotiations with the company has not yielded results. Immigrants demand that Western Union abandon its predatory financial practices or face an ongoing boycott.

**The Sept. 10 press conference to launch the Western Union boycott will begin at 10 am PST at the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor, 2130 West James Wood Blvd.** Featured speakers include United Farm Workers co-founder **Dolores Huerta (invited)**, TIGRA executive director **Francis Calpotura**, La Federación Oaxaqueña President **Artemio Bautista**, Somali Action Alliance Director **Hashi Abdi** from Minneapolis, Local Trustee of the United Steel Workers of America (USWA) **Gwen Gampon**, and L.A. pastor **Father Luis Angel Nieto**. After the press conference, speakers will join with representatives from immigrant and community organizations to march to a nearby Western Union.

“Western Union is taking advantage of the love we send our families living abroad,” said David Villalobos, an organizer with TIGRA in Southern California. “Though they are making millions off of our communities, the company reinvests only 41 cents for every \$100 in profit. This is unacceptable.”

Immigrant advocates are calling on Western Union to adopt a Transnational Community Benefits Agreement (TCBA). The Agreement would lower remittance fees, establish fairer exchange rates, and provide for community reinvestment. Western Union and other money transfer agencies often function as the primary banking service in immigrant communities, yet they remain unregulated by the Community Reinvestment Act and are unaccountable to their primarily low-wage customer base. Immigrants depend on remittances, or money transfers, to send money for food, urgent medical care, and education to their communities of origin.

The company's current reinvestment track record is abysmal, despite their latest “Tres por Uno” program in Mexico and annual profits of more than \$1 billion. Western Union reinvests only 41 cents for every \$100 of profit, as compared to \$2.30 reinvested by Wal-Mart and \$7.50 reinvested by Ben and Jerry's. The “Tres por Uno” program boosts this number to 77 cents for

five participating Mexican states. The TCBA would require Western Union to reinvest \$1 per every transaction.

High fees are another problem. An immigrant worker earning minimum wage must work a full week to pay off a year's worth of Western Union fees and commissions. Although an individual money transfer costs Western Union less than \$5 (dropping to \$3.27 for second and subsequent transactions), the company charges more than \$20. The World Bank estimates Western Union could cut its fees by one-third and still retain profits comparable to its competitors.

On May 10, TIGRA immigrant advocates gave Western Union 100 days to adopt its key demands. They have yet to hear a sufficient response from the company, despite thousands of phone calls, emails, postcards and faxes and a brief face-to-face discussion with CEO Christina Gold. Previous attempts to engage Western Union beginning in September 2006 have proved unproductive. Advocates have been forced to launch a boycott of the company, demanding that Western Union adopt the Transnational Community Benefits Agreement.

Comité Pro Uno, Hermandad Mexicana, and Pilipino Workers Center are part of the Transnational Institute for Grassroots Research and Action (TIGRA), a national network of more than 180 immigrant organizations working together to clean up the practices of the money transfer industry to ensure community reinvestment. Mujeres Unidas, Union de Vecinos, and USWA – Local 675 are additional co-sponsors of the Sept. 10 press conference in Los Angeles. The Western Union boycott will be launched in immigrant communities nationwide beginning September 17. See [www.boycottwesternunion.net](http://www.boycottwesternunion.net) for more information on local boycott activities.

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