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INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS (ICFTU)

## ICFTU OnLine...

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### CHINA: request for payment of wage arrears lands 5 Chinese workers in prison

Brussels, 2nd November 2004 (ICFTU Online): The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) has protested against the unfair and long prison sentences handed down to five workers at the Stella International's Xing Ang Shoe Factory, in China's Guangdong Province.

The Dongguan Municipal People's Court sentenced Wan Jiafeng to three and a half years' imprisonment, Chen Nanliu, Ma Changwei and Qu Pengtao to three years, and Chen Suo, an under-aged female worker, was sentenced to two years imprisonment.

They were charged with "intentional destruction of property" after having participated in a mass demonstration on the evening of 23 April, at the Xing Ang Shoe Factory". Approximately 1,000 workers staged a protest over low wages, wage arrears, poor meals provided by the factory, and over working hours that exceeded limits set in China's labour law. Some machinery and other items of company property were damaged in the course of the protest action. Dozens of other workers are said to have been fired for participating in the protests.

The ICFTU believes that the workers' anger and damage to company property was the result of the absence of independent trade unions through which workers could have communicated their frustration and persuaded management to sit at the bargaining table.

The trial of the five workers lasted barely more than one hour and was closed to the public. This strongly suggests that a verdict had been reached before the trial was heard, says the ICFTU.

In its protest (<http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991220694&Language=EN>) to the Chinese authorities, the ICFTU urged China's President Hu Jintao to order an independent inquiry into all aspects of this case, including illegal working conditions and charges of corruption levelled against the Dongguan Municipal People's Court. The ICFTU also called on President Hu Jintao to order the immediate release of the five workers because of the lack of reliable evidence which could justify their conviction.

The ICFTU says that it will report these court decisions to the United Nation's specialised agency, the International Labour Organisation (ILO), as a part of a comprehensive complaint it has already lodged against the government of China with the ILO's Committee on Freedom of Association.

The ICFTU represents 148 million workers through its 234 affiliated national trade union centres in 152 countries and territories. ICFTU is also a member of Global Unions: <http://www.global-unions.org>

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