

ICFTU OnLine...

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Nepal - ICFTU visits Brussels Ambassador in attempt to secure respect for trade union rights

Brussels, 18th February 2005 (ICFTU Online): In the aftermath of Nepalese King Gyanendra's dismissal of government on 1st February 2005, ICFTU General Secretary Guy Ryder held discussions with the Nepalese Ambassador in Brussels yesterday to express alarm at severe restrictions on trade union activity in the country. The royal dismissal of government has been accompanied by the suspension of civil liberties, including trade union rights, the temporary closure of public sector trade unions and the detention of senior trade union leaders across the country.

Several leaders of the ICFTU-affiliated Nepal Trade Union Congress (NTUC) are amongst the detained, including NTUC Senior Vice-President Puskar Acharya and Central Committee member Manju Bhattarai. In poor health, without access to proper medical care and stripped of basic female hygiene requirements, Ms. Manju is also being deprived of sufficient nutrition at her place of detention.

In a three-page note verbale (<http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991221287&Language=EN>) delivered yesterday (17 February) to N. S. Thapa, Nepal's Ambassador to the Benelux and the European Communities, the ICFTU said the arrests of prominent Nepalese trade unionists had instilled a climate of fear which has forced several more into hiding. The document details other trade unionists who have been arrested in the past 18 days which include leaders of teachers' and journalists' trade unions.

"The fate of several of Nepalese labour activists hangs in the balance. We have reports that the names of trade unionists appear on a list of 1400 people who are to be closely observed and who run the risk of detention" said Ryder. "This is strangling trade union voice in Nepal. Meetings of more than 5 people are now illegal and public sector unions have been temporarily closed by royal decree. Unless democratic rights are restored, trade union rights in Nepal are in danger of slowly but surely becoming a misnomer".

The ICFTU voiced concern that the current climate in Nepal would jeopardise union action on key international dates, such as International Women's Day on 8th March 2005. Current rules prevent the holding of union meetings outside of union offices without prior permission from Chief District Officers. It also said that the new restrictions cast serious doubts over significant progress achieved in recent years in labour legislation and industrial relations, owed in great part to support provided by the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

"Our call is firm and simple" continued Ryder. "Nepal's authorities need to take immediate and necessary measures to release detained trade union leaders and protect others from arrest. The real test is how soon unrestricted civilian rule can be restored in the country. This should be done as a matter of urgency".

The intervention of the world's largest trade union organisation to push Nepalese authorities to respect trade union rights has been matched by the personal involvement of the Director General of International Labour Organisation (ILO) Juan Somavia, who has already written twice to King Gyanendra to relay the ICFTU's concerns.

As reports came in that Nepalese authorities have cut off all telephone lines on the country's annual Democracy Day, ICFTU said it was now

consulting its Asia and Pacific Regional Organisation (ICFTU-APRO), national affiliates in several parts of the world and Global Union Federations to put in place an internationally-coordinated plan of action aimed at restoring trade union rights in Nepal.

The ICFTU represents 145 million workers in 233 affiliated organisations in 154 countries and territories. ICFTU is also a partner in Global Unions: <http://www.global-unions.org>

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