

INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS

ICFTU OnLine:

072/030605

Korea: 1 trade unionist arrested every hour

Brussels, 3 June 2005 (ICFTU Online): The Korean labour movement is being subjected to a tight squeeze on trade union rights said the world's largest trade union body, following the arrest of numerous trade unionists. The catalogue of violations includes the recent arrest of Anwar Hossain, President of the Migrant Workers Union (MTU) who was challenged by 30 police officers in the early hours of 14 May on his way home (<http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991221709&Language=EN>).

Following the arrest during which Hossain sustained hand and head injuries, the ICFTU said "this is yet more damning evidence of the Korean government's consistent attack on trade union rights. The arrest of Hossain shows the Korean authorities' determination to repress migrant trade union activity by detaining its labour leaders."

The migrant trade union leader is still being held at a detention centre south of Seoul.

In the last days, the ICFTU has been prompted to protest to the Korean authorities about the dwindling respect for trade union rights in the East Asian country. In April, 825 unionists were arrested during a demonstration outside Ulsan City Hall in April and on 23 May, 600 trade unionists were arrested during peaceful and legal strike action (<http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991221710&Language=EN>), taking the total of arrests of labour activists to at least 1425 in the space of 8 weeks, or more than 1 trade unionist arrest every hour. The arrests targeted union members and leaders of Ulsan Local Union of the Korean Federation of Construction Industry Trade Union (KFCITU), affiliated to the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU).

Kim Young-Gil, President of the Korean Government Employees Union (KGEU), was one of the most high-profile casualties of the authorities' crackdown on trade union rights, arrested last month. The ICFTU is still looking to determine his whereabouts and whether the trade union leader has been released.

"The international trade union movement is not prepared to sit back and watch respect for trade union rights crumble in Korea. Police interference and arrests of peaceful strikers is not what the world expects of a country which is a member of the UN's International Labour Organisation (ILO). This activity blatantly contravenes the principles of freedom of association and collective bargaining" said ICFTU General Secretary Guy Ryder. Developments in Korea prompted the ICFTU to submit further information to the ILO's Committee on Freedom of Association.

The ICFTU represents 145 million workers in 231 affiliated organisations in 154 countries and territories. ICFTU is also a partner in Global Unions: <http://www.global-unions.org>

The ICFTU is also a key member of the Global Call to Action against Poverty coalition - the world's largest anti-poverty alliance. Spanning trade unions, charities, faith groups and grassroots movements in over 72 countries, the campaign calls for action on trade, aid and debt, and transparent poverty reduction policies. More information can be found on www.whiteband.org

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