

INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS

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CHAD: serious violence against oil workers

Brussels, 28 September 2005 (ICFTU Online): In a letter (<http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991222836&Language=FR>) sent yesterday to the President of Chad, the ICFTU General Secretary protested strongly against the violent attacks against former employees of the Subsahara Tchad-Cameroun Constructors (Subsahara TCC company) who held a sit-in. The attacks resulted in two deaths, three serious injuries and some thirty arrests.

Subsahara TCC, a sub-contracting company working for ESSO, which belongs to the oil consortium headed by EXXONMOBIL, had illegally obliged its employees to work overtime in order to complete the building of a pipeline between Komé and the port of Kribi, in Cameroon one year ahead of schedule. But so far the company has refused to pay the overtime worked by the 4,000 workers on the site. On 23 May 2005, following an arbitration procedure, Subsahara TCC was ordered to pay its former employees a total of 6 thousand million CFA francs. However the company refused to pay the money and managed to obtain a deferment of the sentence through what our sources maintain were corrupt means.

On Sunday 18 September 2005, as the former employees were holding a sit-in to get their former employer to honour the arbitration ruling, the Governor of East Logone ordered units from the national Gendarmerie, summoned specially from the capital N'Djaména, to break up the sit-in and punish the former employees concerned, all of whom are members of the Union des syndicats du Tchad (UST), an ICFTU affiliate.

This armed intervention by the Gendarmerie left two people dead, three people with serious injuries and a further thirty or so under arrest. The detainees have been treated so violently that a third person died as a result of beatings and further physical violence. The ICFTU has also been informed that several workers belonging to trade unions have been actively pursued, even back to their homes.

According to Ryder, "These workers were only exercising their legitimate right to carry out action aimed at obtaining the payment of many hours of overtime, money that was owed to them, moreover, based on an arbitration ruling". "The intervention by the police and the detention and violent abuse of these workers is totally unjustified", he added. Ryder urged the President of Chad to "order the immediate release of the prisoners and convince the company Subsahara TCC to pay the 4,000 workers for their hard work on its construction site".

The ICFTU represents 145 million workers through its 234 affiliated organisations in 154 countries and territories. The ICFTU is also a member of Global Unions: <http://www.global-unions.org>

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