

INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS

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Burma: ICFTU Calls for UN Security Council Debate

Brussels, 21 October, 2005 (ICFTU OnLine):: The ICFTU has thrown its efforts behind efforts by Burma's democratic opposition, including Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) and the Federation of Trade Unions - Burma (FTUB), to place a discussion of the Burmese situation on the agenda of the UN's Security Council.

Following an ICFTU appeal to its worldwide membership earlier this month, national trade union centres in many countries around the globe have already urged their respective governments to write to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan with a request to place Burma on the Council's agenda during its current (October) session and more are expected to do so in the coming days.

"There may be no other case in the world more deserving of UN Security Council attention," said Guy Ryder, ICFTU General Secretary. "The unprecedented action on Burma by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), combined with several other factors, makes Burma's military regime a clear problem not only for its own people but for the entire region and beyond".

The call for action comes four months after the International Labour Organisation called on all its Member States to step up action under a June 2000 Resolution which called on all governments, employers' and workers' organisations to review their relations with Burma and ensure they are not supporting forced labor imposed by Burma's military junta. In 1998, an ILO Commission of Inquiry had found that forced labour, as practiced in Burma, amounted to a crime against humanity. The ILO Governing Body will re-examine the issue during its next Session, in November.

Last September, the ICFTU submitted to the ILO over 1,100 pages of evidence on the continuation of forced labor in Burma. In a letter to ILO Director-General Juan Somavia, the ICFTU stated that "... it remains clear that the imposition of forced labour continues to be a systematic and widespread army practice. This material contains reports from nearly every State and Division of the country on several hundreds of cases of forced portering, repair and maintenance of army camps and villages for displaced people, cultivation of paddy and other fields, road construction, clearing of jungle areas, "human minesweeping", patrolling and sentry duty. It also describes numerous cases of torture, ill-treatment, sexual violence and child labour, including the conscription of child soldiers. As a result of these practices, together with the fact that the SPDC often confiscates their land as well as their food supplies, the people of Burma face starvation and forced migration, both internally and to other countries."

The call for UN Security Council action also comes three weeks after the release of a major report by former Czech President Vaclav Havel and South Africa Nobel Peace Prize recipient Archbishop Desmond M. Tutu. The 125 page report meticulously documents criteria cited by the UN Security Council when it took action on other countries including Haiti, Liberia, Afghanistan, Sierra Leone, Cambodia, and Yemen. It then compares the situation in these countries, including factors specifically cited by the UN Security Council, to the present circumstances in Burma. It concludes that there is a compelling legal case for the Security Council to address the situation in Burma. The Havel-Tutu plan suggests a peaceful UN Security Council resolution compelling the Burmese military regime to work with the UN Secretary General on a plan for national transition and reconciliation.

"It is time for a new, multilateral, and serious initiative at the UN Security Council," added Ryder.

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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