

INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS

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Nepal: Trade unions under siege as two leaders are arrested

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Two trade union leaders, GEFONT's President, Makunda Neupane and General Secretary, Binod Shrestha, were arrested in their homes on 19 January. They could be detained for at least 90 days. The police also searched the trade union organisation's head office and cut the telephone line for three hours. The offices of GEFONT and NTUC are currently under tight police surveillance. The three trade union centres, GEFONT, NTUC and DECONT have firmly condemned the arrests. They fear that NTUC leaders may also be detained.

This recent wave of repression is not only being levelled against trade unionists. Over 60 people from civil society organisations and political parties were also arrested under the pretext that Maoists had infiltrated the 20 January demonstration organised by Nepalese political parties. Since 1 February 2005, when King Gyannendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev seized power, arrests of trade unionists and civil society representatives have been frequent.

The international trade union movement, in a letter of protest sent to the country's authorities, recalled that the Kingdom of Nepal, as a member of the International Labour Organisation, is under an obligation to respect trade union rights and freedom of association.

The international trade union movement has strongly urged the authorities take every measure required to ensure the immediate release of the GEFONT leaders as well as other civil society representatives. It also impressed upon the Nepalese government that the arrest of trade union leaders is contrary to the international obligations of the Kingdom of Nepal.

The arrests of these trade union leaders, along with other violations of trade union rights in Nepal, will be brought to the attention of the ILO Committee on Freedom of Association.

The ICFTU represents 155 million workers in 236 affiliated organisations in 154 countries and territories. The ICFTU is also a partner in Global Unions: <http://www.global-unions.org>

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