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INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS

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General strike brutally repressed in Nepal

Brussels, 12 April 2006 The general strike in Nepal, initially planned to run from 6 to 9 April, was severely repressed by the national police force. The collective action had been organised by the Seven Parties Alliance (SPA), a broad coalition of political parties and civil society organisations, including the three national trade union confederations, the National Trade Union Congress (NTUC), the General Federation of Trade Unions (Gefont) and the Democratic Confederation of Nepalese Trade Unions (DECONT). At least 244 trade unionists and other activists have been arrested and placed in detention.

The attacks began as soon as the strike was called, on 4 April. Numerous people were injured and at least one killed. The long list of trade unionists arrested includes names such as Lalit Basnet, Vice-President of GEFONT, and Anjan Shrestha of the NTUC, who is said to be still suffering from the injury sustained during his arrest.

It is, unfortunately, not the first time the country has seen such brutal attacks on freedom of expression and association. Since 1 February 2005, when King Gyannendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev seized power, arrests of trade unionists and civil society representatives have been manifold.

The ICFTU has firmly condemned these arrests and, in the letters of protest

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<http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991223678&Language=EN>)

sent to the Nepalese authorities, has recalled that the Kingdom of Nepal has an obligation, as a member of the ILO, to respect trade union rights and freedom of association in the country.

The ICFTU has strongly urged the authorities to take every measure required to ensure the immediate release of the trade unionists and other activists in detention. It has also appealed to the Nepalese government to bring an end to the use of violence against peaceful demonstrations, reiterating its concern over the arbitrary arrests and the increasingly disproportionate use of force. The trade unionists and activists arrested were simply and lawfully exercising their right to freedom of association, as guaranteed by Convention 87 of the ILO. This incident, and all future developments in the situation in Nepal, will be brought to the attention of the ILO Committee on Freedom of Association.

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