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Guinea: Killings and Arrests as Government Turns on Strikers

Brussels, 18 January 2007 (**ITUC OnLine**): The ITUC has condemned the killing of at least three civilians, the wounding of many others and the detention of several top union leaders as the country's security forces opened fire with live ammunition on a peaceful demonstration in support of a general strike launched on 10 January. Guinea's national trade union centres initiated the strike to put pressure on the Guinean President Lansana Conte concerning several economic and social claims and good governance issues. Top on the trade union list is a demand that President Conte rescind his personal order for the release from prison a leading figure jailed last year on embezzlement charges. As the tension rose over the last week in the face of increasing police repression of the general strike, unions are now calling on President Conte to leave office due to catastrophic mismanagement of Guinea's economy and his poor state of health. Transparency International recently rated Guinea as Africa's most corrupt country.

Efforts by Rabiatou Serah Diallo and Ibrahima Fofana, General Secretaries of the union centres CNTG and USTG respectively, to convince President Conte to respond to reform proposals were met with delaying tactics by the President of the National Assembly. A peaceful march organised by the CNTG and USTG and trade union centres ONSLG and UDTG on Wednesday was confronted by a tank and military trucks, and security forces opened fire on the marchers, apparently acting under orders.

The building housing the trade union centres (Bourse du Travail) was also attacked by police firing rubber bullets and then ransacked.

The ITUC has taken the case up with the UN's International Labour Organisation, and with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, both of which are important to Guinea's faltering economy.

"This violent reaction to legitimate action by Guinea's trade union movement is totally unacceptable, and constitutes a flagrant violation of freedom of association", said ITUC General Secretary Guy Ryder. "We call upon President Conte to respond immediately and positively to the trade union movement's proposals and find a peaceful solution to the crisis. Those responsible for the violence must be brought to justice, and he must guarantee that fundamental human and trade union rights are fully respected", Ryder added.

Founded on 1 November 2006, the ITUC represents 168 million workers in 153 countries and territories and has 304 national affiliates.

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