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INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (ITUC)

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016/230107

Guinea: International Trade Union Pressure on Authorities

Brussels, 24 January 2007: The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) has reiterated its deep concern regarding the situation in Guinea. Whilst the Guinean inter-union group was meeting in Conakry to take stock of the situation following the bloody repression that had claimed 30 lives on Monday, its leaders were summoned to the palace of President Lansana Conté on Tuesday afternoon. The ITUC is currently studying all the measures needed to force the Guinean government to bring an end to the violence and initiate an open and constructive dialogue with trade union and civil society organisations. According to trade union sources, at least 42 people have lost their lives as result of the violent repression since the beginning of the strike on 10 January.

Several dozen trade unionists, including the general secretaries of the ITUC-affiliated organisations, were arrested on Monday by the red beret troops of the Presidential Guard, who also ransacked the Labour Exchange, where the trade unions' head offices are based. ITUC sources in Conakry affirm that the last trade unionists arrested were released at the beginning of the afternoon on Tuesday. Several of them have returned to the Labour Exchange, left in a state of ruin by members of the Presidential Guard who demolished or seized computers and other equipment. Throughout the day, delegations of Guinean lawyers, magistrates and religious leaders have been going to see the damage for themselves, as have the ambassadors of the European Union, Germany (which is currently presiding the EU) and the United States. Reports have been confirmed that several trade unionists have been violently beaten. Ibrahima Fofana, general secretary of the Union syndicale des travailleurs de Guinée (USTG), is suffering from an eye injury, whilst his counterpart from the Confédération nationale des travailleurs de Guinée (CNTG), Rabiathou Sérah Diallo, has received blows to the nape of the neck and the kidneys.

On Tuesday morning, hundreds of delegates to the World Social Forum in Nairobi (Kenya) came together in a trade union demonstration, marching under the banner "Solidarity with the Workers of Guinea - in Defence of Democracy and Workers' Rights". A trade union delegation met this Tuesday afternoon with the French Ambassador in Nairobi, Elizabeth Barbier, who expressed her government's "concern" over the situation. Efforts were also pursued to meet with the Kenyan president, Mwai Kibaki, and present him with the declaration adopted Tuesday morning by the African regional organisations attending the Forum. The declaration, adopted in the name of the Pan-African trade union movement, urgently calls for frank and sincere unconditional negotiations with the workers, to spare them from any additional suffering given the terrible hardships already being borne on account of the unprecedented economic crisis in the country. The declaration will also be submitted to the African Union (AU) early this evening.

In Geneva, ITUC representatives have contacted the Group of African Countries of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the AU Ambassador to the United Nations. In Brussels, the ITUC has been consulting with its affiliates in Guinea, as well as at African and European level, with a view to proposing a list of measures to international institutions including the European Union (EU), the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The measures studied include the suspension of structural aid and the freezing of the top Guinean leaders' assets abroad. In December 2006, the European Union had announced the unblocking of the 9th tranche of the European Development Fund, which had been suspended in April 2005 following the "deterioration in democratic principles and the rule of law in Guinea". The decision to renew European Aid was based on an agreement between the Guinean authorities and the opposition regarding the democratic elections scheduled for June 2007 and progress in the area of freedom of the press and the reform of the judicial and penitentiary systems. According to the ITUC, "President Conté's interference in judicial cases, corruption in the highest spheres of the government and the rampant misappropriation of public funds defy the European Union's optimism."

In agreement with the ITUC affiliates in Guinea, ITUC General Secretary Guy Ryder affirmed, on his return from Nairobi, the ITUC's determination to support, with all its might, the legitimate protest movement of Guinean trade unionists. Underlining that the general strike had been triggered by "transparent social and

economic grievances", Guy Ryder added that the Guinean government holds full responsibility for the repression that has shocked the trade union community the world over. He also insisted on his determination to personally head an urgent ITUC mission to Guinea and expressed his hope that this will be carried out in close collaboration with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) at the highest level.

Founded on 1 November 2006, the ITUC represents 168 million workers in 153 countries and territories and has 304 national affiliates. <http://www.ituc-csi.org>

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