

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (ITUC)

ITUC OnLine

032/130207

Martial law Decreed in Guinea

Brussels, 13 February 2007 (ICTU OnLine): The Guinean president, Lansana Conte, has placed the country under a 20-hour-a-day curfew as part of a state of emergency due to last until 23 February. The army has been instructed to "restore order". The ILO and the ITUC have launched an urgent call for an end to the violence and guarantees for the safety of trade union leaders.

On 27 January, an agreement suspending the general strike had been reached between the national unions (CNTG-USTG, ONSLG and UDTG) and the Guinean government. On the political side, the agreement provided for "the installing of a broad-consensus government, led by a prime minister in the capacity of independent head of government". On the social and economic side, the commitments included reducing the price of rice, suspending exports of basic foodstuffs for a year, increasing retirement pensions and raising the wages of teachers. Agreements were also reached on "strict respect for the separation of powers principle", the independence of the Central Bank (BCRG) and the pursuit of legal action "against all the predators on the national economy". The agreement signed by the government, the social partners and the president of the National Assembly, acting as a mediator, also established that no repressive measures would be taken against the strikers and that a commission of enquiry would be set up to "identify and punish those responsible for the acts of violence".

The unlimited general strike was resumed on 12 February, in response to the government's failure to respect the agreement. Previous Friday, the President of the Republic appointed his close ally and until then Minister of State for Presidential Affairs, Eugène Camara, as Prime Minister. This designation of the President's right hand man to the post caused widespread uproar among the population, who took the streets to protest. The leaders of the national unions signalled their opposition to the appointment and called on the head of state to step down.

This weekend, the population's anger reached its peak. Public buildings were attacked and gunshots rang out from a military base in the capital.

Meanwhile, soldiers on the streets fired on protesters at point blank range. At least 23 people were killed. The death toll for January and the first half of February has reached over 80, and hundreds of people have been injured. "The armed forces have been ordered to take every step necessary to restore order," declared President Lansana Conte. With the declaration of a state of emergency on Monday evening, the country is now ruled by violence and the lives of trade unionists and the regime's opponents are under serious threat.

"The violence and confrontation in Conakry have already claimed many lives and represent a threat to Guinea's people and trade union leaders, including Ms Rabiou Diallo, a respected member of the ILO Governing Body. I call on the authorities and all those exercising power in Guinea to guarantee the safety of trade union leaders, to ensure the holding of immediate and sincere negotiations, to bring and end to the violence and find a negotiated solution to the serious concerns expressed by the workers, employers and people of Guinea," declared Juan Somavia, director general of the ILO.

"The ITUC, in solidarity with the people and trade unions of Guinea, backs the call of the International Labour Organisation and urges the international community to press the Guinean authorities to end the violence and restore democratic guarantees," said Guy Ryder, ITUC general secretary.

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

Website: www.ituc-csi.org

For more information, please contact the ITUC Press Department on +32 2 224 02 10 or +32 476 621 018

You are currently subscribed to ituc-online as: Rainer.Gries@fes.de

To unsubscribe send a blank email to leave-ituc-online-333432T@forum.ituc-csi.org