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Guatemala: Nine port workers reinstated - Murder of Union leader Zamora must be investigated

Brussels, 22 February 2007 (ITUC online): On 12 February the 9 workers belonging to the port workers' union, Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Empresa Portuaria Quetzal (STEPQ), who had been illegally dismissed by the Port Authority, were reintegrated in the same posts, with the same wages and are now working again, after a tough 4-month battle. This had been one of the demands of Pedro Zamora before his death.

The news was warmly welcomed by the international ITF-ITUC delegation that had visited Guatemala between 28 January and 2 February, and by the whole trade union family, and is further proof of what can be achieved through solidarity action and the strength of the international trade union movement.

Two legal bodies had already endorsed the workers' case and ordered their reinstatement, and on 10 January, in Congress, the Communications Minister had announced that the 9 workers would be reinstated. The Port Authority refused all three injunctions, preferring to pay a fine rather than carry out those demands.

The reinstatement of the workers was one of the demands of the international delegation during its stay in the country, together with a full investigation into the murder of Pedro Zamora. The Port Authority had offered to reinstate them for 9 months, without compensation and if they left the union, which the workers flatly rejected.

Members of the main opposition party, the FRG, promised the delegation that they would call a meeting of the directors of the Port Authority and the workers from the union (STEPQ) to try and find a solution. The meeting took place on 7 February and the politicians gave Mr. Neutze, the Chair of the Board, 8 days to reinstate the workers. If that did not occur they would raise the case in the parliament, to force them to act. Some of the participants referred to the international attention that the case was attracting and the damage this was doing to the country.

The decision by the Port Authority directly resulted from the pressure exerted by the ITF-ITUC delegation on the public authorities, stressed ITUC General Secretary Guy Ryder. Pressure now needs to be kept up to ensure that the material and intellectual perpetrators of the assassination of Zamora are arrested and tried.

Zamora, the General Secretary of STEPQ, was assassinated on 15 January in Puerto Quetzal. The ITUC and the ITF sent protest letters to President Berger and have filed a joint complaint to the ILO.

Three Salvadorian members of parliament were assassinated yesterday in Guatemala. President Oscar Berger described the murders as a vile crime and gave an assurance that his government was determined to find out who

was behind it. The ITUC is pressing the Guatemalan authorities to put the same vigour into investigating the murders of trade unionists.

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

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