

>>> ITUC Press <press@ituc-csi.org> 10.09.2007 16:55 >>>

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (ITUC)

ITUC OnLine...
146/100907

Burma: Heavy Prison Sentences for Six Labour Rights Advocates

Brussels, 10 September 2007 (ITUC OnLine): The ITUC has sent a strongly worded letter of protest to the head of the Burmese military regime, General Than Shwe, over the imposition of heavy prison sentences on six labour rights supporters on 7 September.

The six, Thurein Aung, Kyaw Kyaw, Wai Lin, Myo Min, Kyaw Win, and Nyi Nyi Zaw, were all found guilty of ³inciting hatred or contempt for the government², and some of them for membership of ³illegal associations². Four of the six were sentenced to 28 years prison, and Nyi Nyi Zaw and Kyaw Kyaw to 20 years. All were arrested following a Labour Day event on May 1st in Rangoon.

³This latest act by the Burmese junta is yet another gross violation of fundamental rights by a regime which seems prepared to do anything to hold on to power,² said ITUC General Secretary Guy Ryder. ³Condemning these brave people to decades in prison, simply because they spoke up for workers¹ rights, is an intolerable action which requires a robust and determined response by the international community², he added.

The junta has reacted with force against a series of demonstrations and protests in recent days, as anger at a massive increase in the price of fuel has added to the discontent of people throughout the country over the military's heavy-handed mismanagement of the country and refusal to allow a return to democracy.

The regime's holding of a hand-picked ³national convention², which adopted guidelines for a new Constitution, is a ³sham, lacking any legitimacy with Burma's people and having no credibility with the international community², according to Ryder.

The ITUC <<http://www.ituc-csi.org/spip.php?article1370>>, along with many other organisations and governments, has asked UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon to urgently convene the UN Security Council to discuss the deteriorating situation in the country.

The sentences against the six have also been described by the UN's International Labour Organisation as ³entirely unwarranted². The ILO has called on the Burmese authorities to release those sentenced without delay.

Founded on 1 November 2006, the ITUC represents 168 million workers in 153 countries and territories and has 305 national affiliates.

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