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Georgia: Government Must Lift State of Emergency Immediately and Guarantee Fundamental Rights

Brussels, 9 November 2007 (ITUC OnLine): After several days of protests, Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili has said that Presidential elections will now be held next January, however the state of emergency he imposed on Wednesday remains in force. Demonstrations on Wednesday were brutally repressed by the authorities, leaving hundreds injured.

"The tremendous discontent in Georgia is a direct result of the misguided and failed policies of the government, which leaves no space for dialogue and has seriously undermined fundamental workers' rights. President Saakashvili must lift the state of emergency immediately, and ensure that human rights including the fundamental labour standards are fully respected", said ITUC General Secretary Guy Ryder.

At least one-third of the Georgian population lives below the poverty line, the official unemployment level is 16% (real unemployment is said to be considerably higher) and the pension is Euros 16 per month. Changes to the labour law mean that workers can be fired without any explanation or effective recourse, leading to widespread dissatisfaction over the government's performance.

"The labour laws are leading to fear and uncertainty amongst working people and their families, and the absence of social dialogue and basic rights and freedoms compounds this. Unless Georgia fundamentally changes direction to become a stable democracy, the situation will only get even worse", said Ryder.

The ITUC represents 168 million workers in 153 countries and territories and has 305 national affiliates. Website: <http://www.ituc-csi.org>

For more information, please contact the ITUC Press Department on: +32 2 224 0204 or +32 476 621 018.

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