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Burma's "Saffron revolution" is not over

International trade union and human rights organisations say international community must seize the opportunity now!

Paris, 10 December 2007 (ITUC online): The ITUC and the FIDH today released a new report on Burma entitled: "Burma's "Saffron Revolution" is not over". Based on the findings of a joint international mission to the Thai-Burma border and interviews with participants in last October's protest movement and victims of its repression by the military, the 50-page report includes detailed policy proposals and recommendations to the international community. It comes on the eve of two key events scheduled next week. On Monday, 10 December, which is also International Human Rights Day, EU Foreign Ministers meeting in Brussels are expected to assess the situation after a number of high-profile United Nations visits to Burma. The next day, the same topic will be discussed by the UN Human Rights Council, meeting in Geneva.

As indicated by the report's sub-title, the ITUC and FIDH believe this is the "Time for the international community to act". The underlying analysis is that the violent repression, particularly the targeting by the military of peacefully-demonstrating monks, has deeply antagonised Burma's society, at the same time as it has created new resistance dynamics which are unlikely to fade away. "Desire for change seems to be greater than ever", the report says. Noting that "no real signs of de-escalation of repression and commitment to a peaceful transition have been given by the ruling junta since the crackdown", the world's largest global trade union organisation and the oldest international human rights organisation with a universal mandate argue that the recent events make a strong case for urgent and increased international pressure. They say this view reflects positions defended both by victims and by organisations representing Burma's democracy movement, based inside and outside the country. In addition to meeting with victims and witnesses, the mission held meetings with 15 different organisations as well as with the diplomatic community.

The joint report details four key principles for action and suggests the international community should focus on four main leverage points. The principles stress that Burma should be kept as a top priority on the international agenda; that increasing pressure on the junta now will be useful, not harmful to the reconciliation and democracy process; that the international community should accept "taking responsibility for Burma" rather than sticking to its "wait-and-see" attitude; and that it should implement a two-pronged approach of influencing the regime and encouraging the people by sending clear messages of international support. The leverage points cover detailed recommendations aimed both at raising international pressure on the military junta and supporting national reconciliation; cutting the junta's economic lifeline through comprehensive sanctions including, in particular, the priority sectors of oil and gas, timber, gems and financial - including banking - services, with due consideration, where justified, for exceptions on humanitarian or similar grounds; establishing a "Burma Transition Fund" that would be available after a return to democracy and, finally, supporting a peaceful transition to democracy by concrete initiatives aiming at promoting a culture of democracy within Burma, also directed at the army, the professionalizing of which should be accepted both by officers and soldiers themselves, as well as by the population.

While also expressing support for the "good offices" mission of the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy to Burma, Prof. Ibrahim Gambari and the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Burma, Prof. Sergio Pinheiro, the report notes that the junta has so far failed to fully cooperate with either. It explains why both mechanisms should be allowed to open permanent representation offices in Burma.

The report contains detailed recommendations addressed on all these issues to the UN Security Council, the UN Human Rights Council, the EU, ASEAN and other regional organisations and governments. It also contains a concrete warning to the ruling military junta, that it "should consider very seriously" that, unless

it "acts swiftly to towards implementing the reforms expected from it", it may soon find itself facing legal action against it at the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court. Both options, currently under examination at the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and by the international legal community and human rights movements, respectively, are explained in detail in the relevant sections of the report. Other pressure points, such as a Security Council arms embargo, or decision to place all revenue from international investment and trade with Burma on an escrow account, are also examined in the report.

All stakeholders in the Burma crisis must accept their share of responsibilities in encouraging a peaceful transition to democracy, say the FIDH and ITUC. "There is no time to loose: we cannot run the the risk that the current window of opportunity for a democratic transition swings shut", said Olivier De Schutter, FIDH Secretary General. "While the United Nations Secretary General will declare open, on Monday 10 December a year-long campaign to celebrate the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, our collective capacity to effectively realise and promote peace, human rights and democracy, is at stake" added Guy Ryder, ITUC General Secretary.

To read the full report:

http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/Birmania_FIDH_ITUC_101107.pdf

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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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