

>>> ITUC Press <press@ituc-csi.org> 29.02.2008 13:54 >>>
INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (ITUC)

ITUC OnLine

036/290208

Panama: anti-union repression

Brussels, 29 February 2008 (ITUC OnLine): The ITUC has strongly condemned and denounced the murder, on March 12 February 2008 in Colon province, of trade union leader Hiromi Smith, of the Sindicato Único Nacional de trabajadores de la Industria de la Construcción y Similares (SUNTRACS).

Hiromi Smith was shot by anti-riot forces of the National Police following a protest against the unsafe working conditions at his place of work. Another two workers, Donaldo Pinilla and Eustaquio Smith, were injured.

According to reports on the national TV channel Canal 2, the police had used tear gas and Hiromi was shot as he approached the Hugo Spadafora Policlinic to seek refuge and medical attention for the colleagues injured during the protest. Some 30 workers were arrested during the clashes with units of the National Police.

In a letter to the Panamanian authorities, http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/Asesinato_dirigente_SUNTRACS_28-02-08.pdf the ITUC recalls that it had already written in protest six months ago, following the murder of two trade unionists from SUNTRACS, Osvaldo Lorenzo Pérez and Luigi Antonio Argüelles, during the union's campaign against safety standard violations, aimed at bringing an end to the deterioration in working conditions and the wave of deaths in the construction sector.

The ITUC, pointing out that nothing has been done to resolve these problems, urged the Panamanian authorities and the Labour Ministry in particular to take every possible step to ensure the urgent implementation of the safety regulation applicable to the Panamanian construction industry (Reglamento de Seguridad en Obras) and to bring an end to the national police's excessive use of force against workers.

"Panama needs to see the opening of a broad dialogue in which all those concerned, especially SUNTRACS and the Panamanian Construction Chamber, can commit to optimising workers' safety," said Guy Ryder, General Secretary of the ITUC. "Panama is under an obligation to respect ILO Conventions 87 and 98, both of which it has ratified".

The ITUC represents 168 million workers in 155 countries and territories and has 311 national affiliates. Website: <http://www.ituc-csi.org>
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