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Zimbabwe: Arms Ship "Returns Home"

Brussels, 24 April 2008 (ITUC OnLine): The ITUC has welcomed reports that the ship An Yue Jiang, carrying an arms shipment which was destined for Zimbabwe, is returning with its cargo to its home country China. The ship was due to unload its cargo in Durban, but was unable to do so as members of the transport workers' union SATAWU refused to unload the arms. SATAWU is a member of the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) and of the ITUC-affiliated COSATU.

Subsequent action by ITF and ITUC affiliates in several southern African countries, alongside a broad mobilisation of human rights groups, churches and other civil society organisations, meant that the ship was unable to unload in any port in the region. The Chinese Foreign Ministry has indicated that the ship is bringing its cargo back to China, although the shipping company concerned, COSCO, has yet to confirm this.

"Without the action by the unions of South Africa and neighbouring countries in support of their Zimbabwean colleagues, and backed by the international trade union movement, these arms could well have made it to their intended destination. In the current situation, there can be little doubt that the Mugabe regime would have used them against Zimbabweans, as they have done before", said ITUC General Secretary Guy Ryder.

The ITUC is nevertheless deeply concerned at accounts from inside Zimbabwe that the regime may be seeking to import even more sophisticated arms by air from China in the coming days.

"No country should be supplying arms to Zimbabwe in the prevailing circumstances, and we call upon all governments to join those countries which have called for an international embargo and put this into effect as a matter of urgency", said Ryder.

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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