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True Justice is needed in Burma

Brussels, 10 July 2008 (ITUC OnLine): The ITUC has strongly protested against the very heavy prison sentences, imposed on Friday 7 September 2007, on six labour activists, after they had wanted to organise a seminar at the US Embassy's American Center in Rangoon earlier this year.

On 1 May 2007, Thurein Aung, Kyaw Kyaw, Shwe Joe, Wai Lin, Aung Naing Tun and Nyi Nyi Zaw were arrested after holding a May Day celebration and planning to discuss labour issues at the American Center. This event was immediately canceled after the arrests. Two of them, i.e. Shwe Joe and Aung Naing Tun, were released on 4 May, but on 10 May two other men, Kyaw Win and Myo Min, were arrested for going to the Thai-Burma border to inform the outside world about these May Day arrests.

The ITUC has learned that during a trial held inside Rangoon's Insein prison, all six men were found guilty of "inciting hatred or contempt for the Government," and that some of them were convicted for being members of "illegal associations." Thurein Aung, Wai Lin, Myo Min and Kyaw Win were sentenced to 28 years in prison, and Nyi Nyi Zaw and Kyaw Kyaw to 20 years.

In a letter sent to Senior General Than Shwe, http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/Heavy_jail_sentences_6_labour_activists_10-09-07-2.pdf, the ITUC urge him to instruct the relevant authorities to seek an overturn of these unjustified and scandalous prison sentences and to order the immediate and unconditional release of the six labour activist.

"True justice is needed in Burma, all the more so given the massive humanitarian and rebuilding needs due to the devastation caused by Cyclone Nargis," said Guy Ryder, ITUC General Secretary. The ITUC is referring the issue to the International Labour Organisation's supervisory mechanisms. The ILO has criticized the appalling labour rights record of the Burmese junta, and launched a Commission of Enquiry, the highest-level investigative procedure, into the systematic use of forced labour by the military. The ITUC remains concerned that the junta will again use forced labour in the post-cyclone reconstruction work, and calls upon all the governmental and nongovernmental agencies involved to exercise extreme vigilance to ensure that the humanitarian and reconstruction effort is done in a way which fully respects international labour standards.

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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