

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (ITUC)

ITUC OnLine

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China: Suspects in Stabbing of Labour Rights Activist Finally on Trial

Brussels, 15 January 2009 (ITUC OnLine): After 14 months of delay, the hearing for suspects in the stabbing of Huang Qingnan, a workers' rights activist from Shenzhen, will take place on 16 January.

On 20 November 2007, Huang Qingnan, an activist and former migrant worker from the Dagongzhe labour centre, was brutally assaulted and left in a critical condition after a repeatedly being stabbed. A few weeks prior to the stabbing, the centre itself suffered from a series of violent attacks by unknown assailants. The centre and its facilities were destroyed and staff threatened. The International Trade Union Confederation and affiliates worldwide wrote to the local Chinese authorities to express their condemnation (see: http://www.ituc-csi.org/spip.php?article1632&var_recherche=Huang%20Qingnan)

The stabbing in November 2008 of Huang Qingnan, a long term labour activist in Shenzhen, south China, highlighted the increasingly violent harassment of labour rights groups. The ITUC believes the attack was part of an escalating climate of violence taking place in Shenzhen and parts of Guangdong in the run-up to the January 2008 implementation of the new Labour Contract law. The attack on Huang Qingnan, the Dagongzhe centre and other workers in the Shenzhen region appeared to be consistent with the reports of increasing harassment, monitoring and surveillance of workers rights groups throughout China, but predominantly in the Pearl River Delta.

Despite the arrest of the five suspects in January, the case was delayed for many months - in part because of the sensitivities around the August Olympic Games. In November 2008, almost one year after the stabbing, the ITUC again wrote to the local government urging them to progress with the court case of the five suspects involved. Affiliates once again wrote similar appeals to the Chinese authorities. http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/ITUC_to_Mayor_of_Shenzhen_-_stabbing_labour_advice_worker_26-11-07.pdf

On 18 December 2008, it was announced that the court case would be heard on Christmas Eve, 24th December. Every year the authorities tend to try high profile cases on annual holidays, presumably to avoid media attention. It is perhaps significant that in 2008, the honour of a Christmas court date was reserved for a labour-related case and not the usual human rights activist or dissident. On the morning of the case, many local workers and representatives of labour groups tried to attend the hearing along with Huang Qingnan. The court stated that the courtroom could not hold so many people and that the hearing would have to be rearranged.

On 13 January the Longgang District People's Court announced that a new hearing was set for Friday, 16 January 2009.

We urge the courts and the authorities to ensure that the perpetrators receive adequate sentences, should they be found guilty in the course of a fair and open trial. We again call for an end to the culture of impunity that exists around the illegal and sometimes violent nature of local harassment against labour rights groups - harassment and impunity which hinder the development of a harmonious society. We also very much hope that Huang Qingnan will receive adequate financial compensation for his injuries and rehabilitation. The need for a just settlement is heightened by the current economic slowdown and the impact this is having on local employment, workers rights, wages and collective bargaining power.

The ITUC once again highlights the long term need for the Chinese government to respect the right of workers to form and join free and independent trade unions and to recognize the role which civil society groups - including labour rights' groups - play in the creation and development of a harmonious society. Respect for these core labour standards are of particular importance in the light of the current economic crisis.

The ITUC represents 168 million workers in 311 affiliated national organisations from 155 countries. <http://www.ituc-csi.org>
<http://www.youtube.com/ITUCCSI>

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