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INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION

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Turkey: Workers Protest Against Government's Decision to Close Down Their Workplace

Brussels, 29 January 2010 (ITUC OnLine): Tobacco workers from all around Turkey have been protesting in Ankara against their government for 47 consecutive days. The government decided to close down all the warehouses owned by Tekel, the former state tobacco and alcohol monopoly, which was recently privatised. This would mean the loss of 12.000 jobs by the end of January.

The union which represents the workers, Tekgida-Is, a Türk-Is and IUF affiliate, started protesting in front of the AKP (Turkey's governing party) headquarters in December last year. On 16 December, they were brutally chased away by the police to a nearby park. The following day, the police put up barricades around the park and then used water hoses and tear gas against the demonstrators. Mustafa Türköl, president of Tekgida-Is and Türk-Is general secretary, was arrested, to be released again later on.

Police violence escalated and excessive force was repeatedly used against the demonstrators, many of whom had to be hospitalised. About 8000 workers are currently staging a sit-in strike in front of the Türk-Is national headquarters, while about a dozen of them remain in the park on hunger strike.

On 28 January, a united unions' front, consisting of six national union confederations (including the four Turkish ITUC affiliates), met with Prime Minister Erdogan in Ankara. The Prime Minister ordered his Minister of Finance and his Vice Prime Minister to work out a solution by the beginning of next week. A new meeting between the Prime Minister and union representatives will be scheduled at that point. "The ITUC will closely monitor those meetings" said Guy Ryder, ITUC general secretary. "The international trade union movement supports the Turkish Workers in their legitimate fight for their jobs and will not tolerate the use of brutal force against them", he added.

The united unions' front announced further strike action in early February if no acceptable solution is found.

For more information, also see the IUF Campaign on the Tekel Worker's :
<http://cms.iuf.org/?q=node/157>

The ITUC represents 175 million workers in 155 countries and territories and has 311 national affiliates. Website: <http://www.ituc-csi.org> and <http://www.youtube.com/ITUCCSI>

For more information, please contact the ITUC Press Department on: +32 2 224

0204 or + 32 476 62 10 18

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