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Trade Unions Call on ASEM to Act on Burma

Brussels, 1 October 2010 (ITUC OnLine): Trade unions from across Asia and Europe, gathered in Brussels in for o the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) Leaders' Summit are calling on ASEM Leaders to take action on Burma, including demanding the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners and the ending of attacks on the civilian population, particularly ethnic communities and democracy supporters.

The ITUC is concerned that some in the international community is viewing national elections in Burma next month as a reason to relax pressure on the regime. The elections are deeply flawed: pro-democracy voices have been excluded, other parties have been prevented from campaigning effectively, and regardless of the outcome of the vote, the military is guaranteed effective control of government under a flawed constitution. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon stated on 27 September that elections will not be credible without the release of political prisoners, including democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

The international community needs to significantly step up pressure on the regime until there is tangible progress towards an inclusive and democratic constitution and full respect for human rights.

ASEM governments and social partners can play their part by cutting the trade and investment ties that are keeping the regime in power, in line with the 2000 ILO resolution on Burma.

With the regime stepping up its war against its own people, ASEM Leaders should call on the UN Security council to approve a total arms embargo on Burma and support a UN Commission of Inquiry into crimes against humanity.

To put pressure on the regime to remove its ban on trade unions and give Burmese workers a voice, ASEM governments should support the launch of an ILO Commission of Inquiry into Freedom of Association in Burma in the ILO Governing Body.

Pressure on the regime to end all forms of forced labour must be stepped up. Those who are guilty of using forced labour must be punished and the recruitment of children into the military must stop. A significant starting point would be to ensure that the ILO is able to work freely across the country, including to investigate cases of forced labour.

The ITUC represents 176 million workers in 151 countries and territories and has 301 national affiliates. <http://www.ituc-csi.org> and <http://www.youtube.com/ITUCCSI>

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