

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (ITUC)

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Burma: “Elections Are a Sham” Says ITUC Together with ETUC and Human Rights Organisations

Brussels, 5 November 2010 (ITUC OnLine): The ITUC, together with Belgian union affiliates, the European Trade Union Confederation, the International Federation of Human Rights Organisations (FIDH), Amnesty International and Actions Birmanie, protested in front of the Burmese embassy in Brussels on Friday, 5 November, on the occasion of an International Day of Action ahead of the elections this weekend.

The delegation denounced the sham elections that will take place on Sunday 7th November, as they will not result in the restoration of democracy or of achieving respect for human rights for the people of Burma. Indeed the elections serve to reinforce impunity. The protesters strongly condemned the Burmese military regime’s continued use of repressive and restrictive measures to ensure that the outcome of the 7 November general elections will perpetuate military control of the country.

For all inclusive, free and fair general elections, it is essential to have international electoral supervision and independent media coverage. In September, the election commission cancelled voting in over 3,400 villages in Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Mon, and Shan states. As many as 1.5 million people are believed to have been disenfranchised by this action, and many others are disenfranchised as a result of the electoral laws that exclude opposition parties and democracy activists from freely participating in campaigning and voting. Thousands of people who have supported democracy and human rights remain in prison. The 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 ITUC, together with human rights organisations renew the demand for the immediate release of all 2200 political prisoners, including labour activists.

The post-election scenario is dire. The provisions of the (2008) Constitution are not in accord with democratic principles. The Constitution provides legal justification for impunity, including retroactive immunity from prosecution. Serious international crimes, including extra-judicial killings, forced labour, torture, rape and recruitment of child soldiers, are still being committed in Burma. We support a United Nations led Commission of Inquiry with a mandate to examine war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Burma. Crimes are crimes and elections are elections. A Commission of Inquiry should be seen as a legal process and not some type of sanction. Regardless of the outcome of the election, protection from crimes and justice for victims are still urgently needed.

The ITUC urges the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) to remove its ban on trade unions and give workers in Burma a voice, to give effect in law and practice to freedom of association in Burma and to bring to an end forced labour as promised through its Ratification of Convention 29 on forced labour and its subsequent commitments to the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

Governments and employers, like trade unions around the world, should support the launch of an ILO Commission of Inquiry into Freedom of Association in Burma in the ILO Governing Body.

The ITUC urges the international community through the UN Security Council to approve a total arms embargo on Burma and support a United Nations Commission of Inquiry with a mandate to examine war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The ITUC assure the military authorities that trade unions will continue to campaign to achieve these results, for the respect and full realisation of the human rights of all the people of Burma.

“Democracy means nothing for the military junta,” said Sharan Burrow, ITUC general secretary. “All necessary measures must be taken in order to put pressure on the regime to end all forms of forced labour, to release all political prisoners, including labour activists and to respect the democratic rights of all the people of Burma. True social justice is urgently needed in Burma.”

Photo Galery: <http://www.ituc-csi.org/election-in-burma-is-a-sham-ituc.html>

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