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Bangladesh: ITUC protests over Police Killing of Four Striking Workers

Brussels, 14 December 2010 (ITUC OnLine): The ITUC has protested <http://www.ituc-csi.org/intimidation-and-harassment-of-the.html> to Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina over the killing of four workers protesting at the failure of garment companies supplying world markets to pay the minimum wage. Some 200 others were injured in clashes with police, who opened fire on the demonstrators at the Chittagong Economic Processing Zone on 12 December. Protests also took place in several other garment factory hubs, in the suburbs of Dhaka.

The government raised the minimum wage at the beginning of November, but the new level is still below a decent living wage, leading several trade unions to call on the government to subsidise basic foodstuffs.

“It is an absolute disgrace that big international garment companies don’t ensure that their suppliers pay even the inadequate minimum wage. Many Bangladeshi workers producing for export actually get less and work longer than those producing for the domestic market. The anger and frustration of the country’s hundreds of thousands of textile workers is totally understandable, and rather than repressing legitimate protest activity, the government should make sure that all employers treat their workers fairly and pay living wages,” said ITUC General Secretary Sharan Burrow.

Meanwhile, reports from Bangladesh indicate that more than 20 workers have lost their lives today in yet another garment factory fire, in a plant near Dhaka owned by the Hameem Group which is one of the country’s larger exporters. The ITUC understands that workers from the factory spoke of locked emergency doors, and several jumped from the roof to escape the smoke and flames.

“This terrible fire underlines just how bad working conditions in many of these factories are, as big global brands seek the lowest production costs, and a small elite of local factory owners exploit their workforce so ruthlessly. Those responsible for these appalling conditions must be brought to justice, the families of the victims fully compensated, and real action must be taken to provide safe and healthy workplaces,” said Burrow.

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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