

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION

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Georgia: Europe's Black Sheep for Workers' Rights

Brussels, 5 May 2011 (ITUC OnLine): Georgia is rapidly becoming the black sheep of workers' rights in Europe. The workers are being pressed to work in unhealthy and dangerous environments, trade union activists are being dismissed, and trade union leaders are being harassed and threatened. The whole existence of independent trade union organisations is put at risk.

This coming Friday 6 June there is a country hearing on Georgia in Brussels. Fifty people representing trade union organisations and NGOs from all over Europe will come together to discuss the serious problems concerning human and trade union rights in Georgia.

"Ten years ago we witnessed in the post-Soviet union area the same brutal union busting as we now see in Georgia," said Sharan Burrow, the general secretary of the ITUC.

"We will continue supporting the Georgian Trade Union Confederation and would not hesitate to use all the International and European instruments we possess to confront the anti-unionism policy of the Georgian government. We did so in the Belarus case that finally led to the withdrawal of the European GSP because of workers' rights violations. Our US affiliate the AFL-CIO has already initiated the investigation procedure by the US government regarding respect of the workers' rights in Georgia," she added.

Despite numerous promises to the International Labour Organisation and contrary to the international commitments taken by the country, the Georgian government has not taken any steps or measures towards making trade union and labour rights respected in the country.

While on one hand Georgia is presenting its successes in terms of economic growth, on the other hand it keeps silent on the growing number of human rights violations and the total disregard and ignorance of health and safety issues, which has led to costs in workers' lives on an increasing scale. Employers also did not refrain from targeting workers who sought to establish a union, using the provision of a medieval labour code the Georgian government is so proud of. Georgia is one of the very few countries in the whole world that does not have a labour inspection.

"How can a government ignore core labour rights – on freedom of association and collective bargaining, on health and safety at work – and count on success of processes of association with the European Union?" asks Irakli Petriashvili, president of the Georgian trade union confederation GTUC. "European decision makers should not have any illusions that behind the democratic façade there is a government that is devoted to busting the democratic values and interests of workers. We cannot accept the increasing insecurity and lack of rights and the fact that workers are risking and losing their lives at work and that their organisations are being attacked by the authorities," added Petriashvili.

When?

The meeting takes place in the CSC building, Rue de Trève 31, Brussels 6 May 11 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. Trade union leaders from Georgia will be available for interviews.

Contact:

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The ITUC represents 175 million workers in 151 countries and territories and has 305 national affiliates. Website: <http://www.ituc-csi.org> and <http://www.youtube.com/ITUCCSI>

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