

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (ITUC)

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Belarus: Climate for Workers' Rights is Worsening

Brussels, 24 February 2012 (ITUC OnLine): The ITUC has called on Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko to stop a new round of anti-union harassment against workers at the RUPP "Granite" company in Brest. Some 600 workers from the construction materials enterprise left the official government-controlled union in protest at low wages and the lack of effective representation. They moved to set up their own independent trade union last December, and have since faced a wave of repression from the management and the authorities.

One of the new union's leaders, Oleg Stakhaevich, was falsely accused of causing a motor vehicle accident and sacked, while Liudmila Litvinka, the wife of another activist, was also dismissed. Union supporters have been threatened that their competency assessments, required for certain jobs, will not be validated if they stay in the union, and government authorities have supported the company management at every turn. Senior government representatives have been seen visiting the site in recent weeks.

"The Belarus authorities are demonstrating their fear of genuine union representation, and trying to bring workers back under the control of the state apparatus. In a system of labour relations where the state controls everything, simple developments like workplace democracy and independent unions are seen as vital dangers to its future," said ITUC General Secretary Sharan Burrow. "For years the regime has been trying to suppress independent unions in Belarus, but it has failed and will continue to fail."

In a letter to Alexander Lukashenko <<http://www.ituc-csi.org/violations-trade-union-rightsat.html>>, the ITUC has called for the authorities to ensure that the workers are reinstated, that the harassment of union advocates cease, and that Belarus respect its obligations to respect freedom of association as a member state of the ILO.

The ITUC represents 175 million workers in 153 countries and territories and has 308 national affiliates.

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