

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (ITUC)
ITUC OnLine
050/310513

Union Officials Arrested at FIFA Congress in Mauritius

Brussels 31 May 2013 (ITUC OnLine): Eight Mauritian and international trade union representatives have been arrested and charged for holding a peaceful demonstration outside the FIFA Congress in Mauritius today, calling for FIFA to re-run the vote awarding Qatar the 2022 World Cup.

"We followed the law, but were arrested illegally simply because we want people to know the truth about Qatar's appalling record on worker's rights and safety.

Today's police action threatens democracy in Mauritius," said local trade union leader Toolsyraj Benedyn who is also Vice-President of the ITUC African Regional Organisation.

Mauritian law allows up to 12 people to hold a peaceful demonstration without prior permission. While many others wanted to join the demonstration, the three trade union centres, MLC, MTUC and NTUC, decided to keep well within the legal limit and follow well-established police procedures. However the police arrested the eight just before the FIFA cavalcade passed them on their way to the Congress opening, then charged them with holding a demonstration without a permit.

"We don't yet know if this was done purely at FIFA's demand, or if Qatar has also used its financial muscle to push Mauritius to betray its own democratic tradition. FIFA should be ashamed at being used as a vehicle to export Qatar's repressive policies to the country hosting its Congress," said ITUC General Secretary Sharan Burrow. "We demand that the authorities release the eight arrested, and withdraw all charges against them".

The latest in a slew of corruption allegations in world football hit Mauritius itself on the eve of the Congress, with national Football Association president Dinnanathlall Persunnoo accused of involvement in match fixing. Persunnoo has denied the allegations. Congress delegates are dealing with controversies over financial transparency, age limits for FIFA officials and the decision to award the World Cup to Qatar.

Prior to the Congress opening, FIFA President Sepp Blatter inaugurated a new football pitch at a FIFA-supported training facility, and the Mauritius Football Association renamed its headquarters "Sepp Blatter Football House".

The ITUC represents 175 million workers in 156 countries and territories and has 315 national affiliates.

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