

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION
ITUC OnLine

Global union organisations back embattled Korean union

Brussels, 13 November 2015 (ITUC OnLine): The ITUC and ITF (International Transport Workers) have swung into action to support a Korean trade union facing state victimisation. Both bodies are mobilising their global networks of affiliated unions to protest to the Korean government following a raid by 200 police officers against the Korean Public Service and Transport Workers' Union (KPTU), and the brutal arrests of seven union members.

The KPTU reports that this latest attack on the Korean labour movement comes in response to KPTU drivers' struggles for union recognition, safe rates and dignity. It has appealed for unions worldwide to register their protests (see below). Its president, Sangsu Jo, said: "Many unions around the world have already expressed their willingness to stand in solidarity with us. This outpouring of support is greatly appreciated and is much needed to stop further repression."

ITUC General Secretary Sharan Burrow said: "This is a severe violation of the fundamental right to freedom of association, which is guaranteed under international law. Those who've been arrested must be released immediately, and this latest anti-union action by the Korean authorities should be stopped immediately. KPTU members have the right to protect and advance their interests through their union, and the government has no right to repress legitimate union activity."

ITF president Paddy Crumlin added: "There's no way this raid can be defended or justified. It was clearly intended to stun the union into submission – and stop its lawful activities. Those behind that intent have overlooked that they just can't get away with it. The union has justice on its side and friends worldwide."

Tony Sheldon is General Secretary of the Transport Workers of Australia, which originated a campaign for Safe Rates in trucking, nationally and internationally (see <http://goo.gl/PTDB4b>) that has been adopted by the KPTU. He commented: "Last week's raid and the subsequent arrests were clearly an attempt to gag and intimidate the union. The response both from the union and its colleagues worldwide has shown how badly that attempt failed."

This is the information supplied by the KPTU regarding the raid and the events leading up to it:

On the morning of Nov. 6 the South Korean police attempted a raid on the headquarters of the KCTU-Korean Public Service and Transport Workers' Union (KPTU). The police used the pretext of a high altitude protest being carried out by striking KPTU-Cargo Truckers Solidarity Division (KPTU-Truck Sol) owner driver members who haul goods for the food products company Pulmuone to carry out the raid. Some 200 police were mobilised in the action.

In addition to taking files from the TruckSol office on the 2nd floor of the KPTU's building, police violated the spaces of unrelated KPTU affiliates and attempt to raid upper floors

housing the KPTU secretariat and other KPTU-affiliated institutions, but were stopped by protesting union officers and members and supporters.

The KPTU-TruckSol Pulmuone Chapter began striking on 4 September calling on Pulmuone to take responsibility for union recognition, safety and decent conditions in its supply chain. Since 24 October two Pulmuone Chapter members have been carrying out a high-altitude protest atop a billboard toward in front of the National Assembly building in Seoul. This fight is part of KPTU-TruckSol's decade long struggle for safe rates and client responsibility. Instead of listening to truck drivers' just demands however, the government and police have chosen the route of repression. In addition to the raid on the KPTU office, arrest warrants have been issued for some dozen KPTU-TruckSol officers and members. On 11 November 7 KPTU TruckSol members were arrested in relation to these warrants and are currently in custody.

The KPTU is now working together with the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions to protest the government's labour market reform policies, which will make layoffs easier and expand precarious work. This raid on the KPTU office must be understood as part of a wider attempt to suppress the democratic labour movement ahead of mass worker protests scheduled for November 14 and further strike action later. It is also reminiscent of the police raid on the KCTU office in the midst of the KPTU-Korean Railway Workers' Strike in December 2013.

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For more details please contact:

ITF: Sam Dawson, Press and Editorial Manager. Tel: +44 (0)20 7940 9260. Email: dawson_sam@itf.org.uk

ITUC: Press Office +32 2 224 0212 Email: press@ituc-csi.org

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