

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION

Korea: Authorities Targeting Hundreds of Trade Unionists

Brussels, 4 December 2015 (ITUC OnLine): The ITUC has learnt that police in Korea are targeting hundreds of trade unionists in advance of a planned December 5 rally of unions and other civil society organisations, stepping up repression of those opposed to the business-friendly policies of President Park Geun-hye. A total of 411 people have been identified from photographs taken at public rallies and are facing summons and arrest. President Park, daughter of former military dictator Park Chung-hee, is facing intense criticism at home and abroad for the government's attacks on freedom of assembly and workers' rights.

In just the past two weeks, 9 members and officials from the public service and transport union KPTU have been arrested, and a further 5 officials from the tower crane branch of the construction union KCWU were imprisoned. The crane operators were jailed for seeking a collective bargaining agreement with a crane rental company. Despite a court ruling that they were entitled to seek an agreement, and the fact that the union has agreements with 142 other such rental companies, prosecutors took the case to an appellate court to have arrest warrants issued. A local official of the KCTU national trade union centre was also detained on 2 December, continuing a pattern of surveillance, harassment and imprisonment.

ITUC General Secretary Sharan Burrow said, “The Korean government is acting in a dictatorial and abusive manner to its own people, using arrest and imprisonment to back employers which refuse to respect basic rights to union representation and collective bargaining. Korea is betraying its commitments at the ILO and the OECD to uphold international labour standards. This is a very dangerous path for any country. We call on the government to recognise that it is behaving in a manner which contradicts core principles of democracy and to cease its attack on fundamental liberties”.

The ITUC represents 180 million workers in 162 countries and territories and has 333 national affiliates.

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