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ITUC OnLine

Samsung's Galaxy 8: Produced by Exploitation

Brussels, 30 March 2017 (ITUC OnLine): Samsung's new Galaxy 8 smart phone is produced by an exploited and harassed workforce, according to an ITUC investigation into the company's aggressive anti-union employment practices. A company-wide policy uses a combination of bribes, threats, bullying, dismissal and even kidnapping to keep its employees, and people working for its suppliers, under total control. 200 Samsung workers have fallen ill with leukemia, lymphoma and other occupational diseases, yet Samsung refused to give details of the chemicals used in production until a district court ruled against the company's secrecy policy earlier this year. 76 of the workers, mostly in their 20s and 30s, have died.

The revelations follow the launch of the disastrous "exploding phone" Galaxy 7 model in 2016, and the arrest of company head Lee Jae-yong in the huge corruption scandal which led to the ouster of Korean President Park Geun-hye.

Sharan Burrow, ITUC General Secretary, said "Samsung's Galaxy 8 is a global poster boy for corporate greed. While the world's media has focused on the dangerously defective Galaxy 7 and the corruption scandal engulfing company headquarters, thousands of Samsung workers have been toiling in dangerous and oppressive conditions to deliver the new model. People who are thinking of buying a Galaxy 8 should know that it is a product of exploitation."

A 115-page union busting manual obtained by a member of Korea's National Assembly in 2013 details how Samsung senior management are trained in techniques to stop workers joining trade unions at all costs. The Galaxy 8 is being produced under the same conditions, despite calls from the International Labour Organisation's Committee on Freedom of Association for the Korean government to investigate and make the company respect basic workers' rights.

The case at the ILO, brought by the ITUC, Global Union Federation IndustriALL and Korean trade unions, accuses the company of systematic surveillance and intimidation of workers, dismissal of union members, severing contracts with unionised suppliers, non-compliance with agreements, fictional contracting arrangements, and instructions to managers to violate labour laws.

The case also describes Samsung's "greening" process, which is forced on supplier companies, in which workers are offered inducements to stop them joining unions, as well as persuasive tactics on workers' families, and sacking workers who take up leadership positions in local unions. The case of a worker at Samsung's Ulsan service centre who was kidnapped by managers is detailed in the ILO case. The worker was made to get into a car and driven to an island tens of kilometres away, where his mobile phone was confiscated. Locked in a room, he was told that he would not escape the island unless he withdrew from the union.

In its findings, the ILO Committee on Freedom of Association expressed deep concern over the allegations, and regretted that although a government investigation confirmed kidnapping and harassment of several unionists, the Prosecutor's Office did not deem it sufficient to initiate criminal proceedings.

"Hopefully the fall-out from the corruption scandal will end the covert collusion between Samsung and the Korean authorities who have a duty to protect workers, but the people who

make the Galaxy 8 and other Samsung products deserve justice, and the public and consumers can help by demanding an end to Samsung's brutal and repressive treatment of its workforce," said Burrow.

Tell Samsung to end the brutal and repressive treatment of its workforce:

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