

STATEMENT of the ILO WORKERS' GROUP

on the situation of human and trade union rights in Nepal

Since the dismissal by HM King Gyanendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev of Nepal of his Government, on 1 February 2005, civil liberties and fundamental workers' rights of leaders and members of Nepalese trade unions, together with a large number of other independent organisations, have been suspended as part of a series of anti-democratic measures.

Scores of trade unionists, journalists, political leaders and democracy activists have been arrested to date, some of who are known to be in poor health, while many others live in fear of being arrested. In spite of repeated personal interventions by the Director-General at the highest possible level of the State, several trade union leaders remain in jail at present, with the prospect of spending many more months in detention. They include:

- *Mr. Puskar Acharya*, Senior Vice-President Nepal Trade Union Congress (NTUC), from Biratnagar;
- *Ms. Manju Bhattarai*, NTUC Central Committee Member, from Kathmandu;
- *Mr. Bhakta B. Karki*, NTUC Vice-President, Western Region (Dhangadi),
- *Ms. Sarita Boon*, NTUC District Member, Kathmandu – Teachers' Union
- *Ms. Gita Pathak*, Central Committee Member, NTUC Construction Workers' Union
- *Mr. Murari Sharma*, President, NTUC Kaski District, detained in Pokhara
- *Mr. Shamsher Bd. Thapa*, Vice-President, NTUC Construction Union, Kathmandu
- *Mr. Arjun Lal* - President of Makawanpur District NTUC
- *Mr. Ramakanta Sapkota*, former General Secretary of the Nepal National Teachers' Association (NNTA)
- *Mr. Chandra Bhattari*, Senior Vice President, Construction Workers' Union - NTUC, Pokhara.
- *Mr. Ramjee Kunmar*, Vice-President NTUC, detained in Pokhara
- *Mr. Binda Sahnj*, Vice-President, NTUC Rautahat District
- *Mr. Bom Bahadur*, NTUC Vice-President, Western Zone

Trade union activities have been severely limited, with any union meetings requiring prior authorisation from public officials, which is contrary to fundamental ILO standards. Trade union offices and private houses of trade union leaders and activists have been searched, documents and other trade union materials confiscated and trade union gatherings – including, especially, a joint union rally on International Women's' Day (8th March 2005) – have been forbidden or severely disrupted.

The Workers' Group of the ILO Governing Body notes that many governments have already taken steps, including measures affecting international cooperation assistance, in order to persuade Nepal's authorities to restore unrestricted

civilian rule in the country and lift all measures affecting the free exercise of all human rights.

The Workers' Group of the Governing Body urges Nepal's authorities to take immediate and necessary measures to protect the leaders of the Nepalese trade unions and all other sectors of civil society from being arrested or put under house arrest, to release immediately and unconditionally all above-mentioned trade union leaders and officials as well as other unionists, journalists, human rights' advocates and other individuals who have been arbitrarily detained so far . It further urges the Government to avoid any further violation of human and trade union rights.

The Workers' Group of the Governing Body expresses the firm opinion that the suspension of democracy and the violation of fundamental trade union and other human rights are not conducive to solving Nepal's problems. What the country urgently needs at present is a concerted effort to bring all constitutional forces together and develop a comprehensive set of constitutional, social and economic reforms. Failure to do so will only perpetuate a climate of fear, which is counterproductive for any country that is in urgent need of a stable political and economic environment.

Geneva, 22 March 2005