

Global labour leaders call for release of Nepalese trade unionists

ILO Governing Body

Geneva, March 22 2005 (ACTRAV Info): A group of top trade union leaders who are taking part in a session of the Governing Body of the tripartite UN's International Labour Organisation (ILO) went today to the Nepalese mission to the UN in Geneva to express their concern about the situation in Nepal and call for the release of detained trade unionists.

The move is part of a global campaign launched by the Brussels-based International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and World Confederation of Labour (WCL) and Global Union Federations (GUFs), which decided to declare March 22 as International Day of Union Action on Nepal.

According to the trade unionists, at least 25 labour activists were arrested in the wake of the emergency rule imposed by the King of Nepal on February 1. Many of them are still detained and some are in poor health condition. Laxman Basnet, President of the ICFTU-affiliated Nepal Trade Union Congress, who is in Geneva for the ILO meeting as a member of the Governing Body, is among 1,400 persons whose names appear on a "hit list" targeted for arrest or close surveillance.

In a statement addressed to the King of Nepal and handed over today to the Nepalese Ambassador in Geneva, the members of the workers' group of the ILO Governing Body demanded the immediate and unconditional release of all detained trade union leaders and the immediate restoration of their basic 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 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. "Restoring all democratic and trade union rights is indispensable to put the country back on the path of democracy" said LeRoy Trotman, Chairperson of the ILO Workers' Group and Vice-Chair of the ILO Governing Body, who headed the workers' group delegation.

Following an official complaint lodged with the ILO, the situation in Nepal was on the agenda of the Governing Body's Committee on Freedom of Association whose report will be tabled for adoption by the tripartite UN agency on Thursday March 24. The Workers' Group said it also intends to submit a

resolution to the Governing Body in order to seek further intervention by the ILO "as a matter of urgency".

Under the pretext of ending the prolonged conflict between the authorities and the Maoist insurgency and tackling corruption and inefficiency, King Gyanendra dismissed his government on February 1 and suspended all civil liberties. At the same time, the Royal Nepal Army began rounding up leaders of the major political parties. All phone, email and air communications were suspended, cutting off Nepal from the outside world. While the proclamation was being read, military units entered all media organisations to prevent all radio and television news broadcasts and to censor and ban news and information in print. A number of journalists were arrested.

Trade unions world-wide are taking various initiatives on the international day of action to bring pressure to bear on the Nepalese authorities. The ICFTU has written to World Bank's President James Wolfensohn and IMF Managing Director Rodrigo de Rato calling for lending to Nepal to be suspended until human rights, including trade union rights, are properly restored.

The Governing Body is the executive body of the International Labour Office (the Office is the secretariat of the Organization). It meets three times a year, in March, June and November.

It is composed of 56 titular members (28 Governments, 14 Employers and 14 Workers) and 66 deputy members (28 Governments, 19 Employers and 19 Workers).

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