

URGENT ACTION REQUESTED!!

New Release for International Campaign for the Immediate Release of WTO Political Prisoners

Hunger strike and call for action

Wednesday 4 January 2006, by [HKCTU](#), [HKPA](#), [KCTU](#), [Korean Catholic Farmers Association](#), [Korean Struggle Mission against Hong Kong WTO Ministerial](#), [KPL](#), [La Via Campesina](#) (Date first published: 4 January 2006).

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(Sponsoring organizations: Korean Struggle Mission---Korean Confederation of Trade Unions, Korean Peasants League, and Korean Catholic Farmers Association---Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions, Hong Kong People's Alliance, and Via Campesina)

For background information read the full release of the "International Campaign for the Immediate Release of WTO Political Prisoners" (see below)

Hunger Strike Launched by the WTO Political Prisoners

12 of the 14 WTO Political Prisoners have decided to launch an indefinite hunger strike starting January 5 to not only highlight the injustice of their case, but more importantly highlight the reason for them coming to Hong Kong — to protest against the WTO. Their fight was not with the people of Hong Kong, but with the undemocratic institution of the WTO and the free trade policies implemented by the WTO without any real consultation with workers and farmers.

Call for Action

We are calling for the international community to express your outrage to the Hong Kong government and the Hong Kong police by calling for the immediate release of the 14 WTO political prisoners. We are asking individuals and organizations to participate in a variety of activities that we are launching in conjunction with the Hunger Strike by the WTO Political Prisoners.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

International Support Letter Writing Campaign

Write to Donald Tsang calling for the immediate release of the 14 WTO Political Prisoners. Please see the enclosed sample letter. Send copies of all letters to the International Committee for the

Immediate Release of the WTO political prisoners at [antiwto2005 naver.com](http://antiwto2005.naver.com) and [hkpa.documentation gmail.com](mailto:hkpa.documentation@gmail.com).

Coordinate an International Day of Action

We are calling for interested organizations and individuals to coordinate a protest rally in front of the Chinese Embassy on Monday, January 9, 2006 at 12:00 pm. In addition to the rally, we urge people to meet with embassy officials calling for the immediate release of the 14 WTO Political Prisoners.

Please send all information of international day of actions to [antiwto2005 naver.com](http://antiwto2005.naver.com) and [hkpa.documentation gmail.com](mailto:hkpa.documentation@gmail.com).

Participate in an Internal Solidarity Mission to Hong Kong.

We are coordinating an international delegation consisting of key leaders from trade unions, human rights groups, civil society organizations, peasant's groups, and other social movements to participate in a solidarity mission to Hong Kong. The program will start with a local rally coordinated by Hong Kong support groups on January 8, participating in the international day of action and press conference on January 9, visiting key members within the Hong Kong government and the prosecution on January 10 and ending with observing the pre-trial hearing scheduled for January 11.

For more information about the International Solidarity Mission, please contact Elizabeth Tang of the HKCTU at 852-9091-9088 and Jin Sook Lee of the KCTU at 852-6733-8395

Solidarity Hunger Strike

We are calling for individuals and organizations to conduct a solidarity hunger strike for either one meal or one day anytime between January 5 to 11, 2006.

Please send all information of solidarity hunger strike to [antiwto2005 naver.com](http://antiwto2005.naver.com) and [hkpa.documentation gmail.com](mailto:hkpa.documentation@gmail.com).

Financial Support

We appeal for financial support towards the expenses that the detainees have incurred as a result of the detention. Donations can be sent to HKBS 001-393248-001 or by cheques payable to Student Christian Movement of Hong Kong. Please send cheques to Mr. Chan Chiu Wai at 7/F Wing Wong Building 557-559 Nathan Road Kowloon, Hong Kong. Be sure to note on the cheque that the donation is "support for arrested WTO protestors".

International Support Letter Writing Campaign

Dear Friends,

Please continue to show your solidarity with the 14 WTO Political Prisoners. A new sample letter is included below which reflects the most current information about the status of the 14 detainees, and specifically calls on the government to address human rights violations.

Sample Letter

Mr. Donald Tsang
Chief Executive
Special Administrative Region of Hong Kong
People's Republic of China

Via fax: 852-2509-0577 or Via e-mail ceo ceo.gov.hk

January 4, 2006

Dear Chief Executive Tsang:

On behalf of _____, I am writing to express our deep concerns about the arrest of 14 protestors from South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and mainland China, who are facing charges of unlawful assembly for the events that transpired on the December 17, 2005 near the vicinity of the 6th World Trade Organization's Ministerial Conference site in Hong Kong.

The 14 protestors charged were among more than 1,300 people arrested on the night of December 17 questioning the on-going negotiations within the conference site, which would undoubtedly be detrimental to the livelihood of farmers, workers, and people around the world. The protestors were attempting to voice their frustration and desperation at yet another round of the WTO Ministerial conference that yielded no measures to alleviate poverty or to address their concerns.

Although all fourteen are released on bail, it is our understanding that the Hong Kong government has formally charged them with "unlawful assembly" and they are considering adding new charges. We are very concerned by the actions of the Hong Kong government and the police. Thus, we strongly call for the immediate release of the 14 protestors so that they can return home to their families.

We must also voice our serious concerns at the uncalled for and excessive use of force by the Hong Kong Police during the night of the 17th. Many were injured, and electric shock batons were used, while reports of "beanbags pellets" being fired upon have also been confirmed. We have been told that there were numerous instances of human rights violations during the process of detaining over 1,300 protestors that have been documented by human rights organizations. We urge that an impartial and thorough inquiry into the human rights violations and the violence used on the part of the Hong Kong police be pursued.

As concerned _____ regarding this matter, we would like to point out that a failure to properly investigate and rectify human rights violations would reflect negatively on the human rights standards of the Special Administrative Region of Hong Kong. A harsh sentence for the 14 would also put into question the democratic tolerance of the region, taking into account that no foreigners have been arrested in previous cases of similar demonstrations.

We will continue to monitor closely the proceedings regarding the 14 protestors and again stress our call for the immediate release of the 14 activists.

We thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,

(list of signatories)

CC: Pascal Lamy

Fax: 41-22-731-42-06 or enquiries wto.org

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Full release of the “International Campaign for the Immediate Release of WTO Political Prisoners”

International Campaign for the Immediate Release of WTO Political Prisoners

(Sponsoring organizations: Korean Struggle Mission---Korean Confederation of Trade Unions, Korean Peasants League, and Korean Catholic Farmers Association---Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions, Hong Kong People’s Alliance, and Via Campesina)

Background

During the 6th World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference that was held in Hong Kong from December 13 to 18, 2005, thousands of participants representing trade unions and labor rights groups, peasant’s, civil society, migrant rights, and women’s organizations, and social movement organizations participated in a series of peaceful protests, rallies, and other actions to protest the WTO and its impact on workers, farmers, and people all around the world, specifically in developing countries.

On the eve of the conclusion of the WTO Ministerial meetings (December 17), these groups realized that despite their many efforts, to express their concerns and have their voices heard, the so-called representatives of the people continuously refused to listen. Government officials and trade analysts had cloistered themselves in the convention center pushing forward to achieve some sort of consensus and finalize an agreement that would once again clearly favor developed countries, fail to alleviate poverty, and further increase the gap between the rich and poor.

As rally participants attempted to make their way to the convention center, the Hong Kong police forcibly blocked them. Knowing that this could be their last chance, the participants decided to move forward. Although the Hong Kong police attempted to disperse the crowd, the participants were desperate to enter the convention site. They became increasingly frustrated by the efforts of the Hong Kong police to stop and silence them and as a result a confrontation ensued between the participants and the Hong Kong police.

Hong Kong Police Violations Against Demonstrators

During this confrontation the police used excessive force, pepper spray, tear gas, and more importantly anti-riot beanbags (rubber bullets) to stop the participants. It was recently revealed that the Hong Kong police had never used beanbag bullets on demonstrators in Hong Kong, and that they are only intended to be used against rioters. It should be noted that the participants in no way started a riot nor was it their intention to do so. The intentions of their actions were peacefully motivated and thus, the response of the police in no way warranted such drastic actions.

As a consequence many were injured during the confrontation.

Little past midnight on December 18, the Hong Kong police surrounded the protestors and refused to let anyone to either enter or leave the cordoned area. Starting at 2:30 am, the police declared that everyone was participating and an “unlawful assembly” and began to systematically arrest more than 1,300 participants. Since the police did not have sufficient vans to transfer the participants, it took them over ten hours to arrest everyone and incarcerate them in 14 detention centers across Hong Kong.

During the arresting and detention process a number were beaten by the police, hundreds were forced to be handcuffed in plastic cable wires behind their backs for more than three hours waiting to be processed by the police at the detention centers, and in certain cases, in the early stages of the detention, women were strip searched. A large number of detainees were held for 48 hours, the legal time frame for the Hong Kong police to either charge those arrested or release them. During this time many participants, in some cases 20 people together, were forcibly cramped into 3x3 cells with no blanket to cover the cold cement floors.

14 WTO Political Prisoners

In the end, the Hong Kong government released all of the participants except 14 individuals who they deemed to be the ringleaders and thus responsible for damages to public property and injuries suffered by the Hong Kong police. Of the fourteen arrested, nine are South Korean farmers, two are members of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU), one is a homeless rights activist in Japan, one is a Taiwanese student, and one is mainland Chinese. Although the 14 WTO Political Prisoners are out on bail, twelve of the defendants (eleven Korean and one Japanese) are currently living in a local church due to the generosity of the Hong Kong Catholic Bishop, awaiting their trial. It should be noted that this is the first time that foreign nationals have been charged and are undergoing a formal trial procedure for participating in actions against the WTO.

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