

Anti-WTO protesters storm Chinese embassy

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MAKATI, PHILIPPINES- Filipinos who took part in the anti-WTO protests in Hong Kong last week trooped to the Chinese consular office here this morning demanding the immediate and unconditional release of fourteen protesters who remained under the custody of Hong Kong police following a violent mass action during the 6th World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference (WTO MC6).

"We strongly condemn the mass arrests and crackdown against World Trade Organization demonstrators," said FDC vice president Wilson Fortaleza. "We join other anti-WTO activists around the world in asserting the legitimacy of protest. We continue to support and call for the immediate and unconditional release of those who are still detained. We call for better treatment of detainees, and demand an apology from the Hong Kong authorities for their actions."

Some 100 member of Jubilee South - Asia Pacific Movement on Debt Development, Sanlakas, Freedom from Debt Coalition, Bukluran ng Mangagawang Pilipino (Solidairty of Filipino Workers), Partido ng Mangagawa (Labor Party), Kalayaan!, Kilusang Mangingisda (Fisherfolks Movement) and Stop the New Round! Coalition, assailed the Hong Kong government for its hard line stance in dealing with the arrested protesters by continuously detaining them despite appeals from many organizations and the foreign minister of the Korean government.

On December 17, on their way to the designated protest zone, more than one thousand protesters led by the South Koreans were merrily chanting "I love Hong Kong" and "I hate WTO" to the delight of Hong Kong nationals, tourists and other protesters including the Filipinos.

However, an hour later, violence erupted. The Hong Kong police forcibly stopped and arrested all activists who were trying to reach the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre where the WTO MC6 was taking place. The police used pepper spray, water hoses and eventually, tear gas, to disperse the protesters. Many demonstrators were injured and some were hospitalized.

"Undoubtedly, the Hong Kong police used unnecessary excessive force on the protesters, who are mostly farmers, fisherfolks and women," said Fortaleza, also president of Sanlakas, adding that their group received reports from their networks in Hong Kong that many detained protesters have been mishandled or beaten by the police and were denied medical aid, food, water and bathroom facilities.

Most of those arrested have been released, but the Hong Kong government sent 14 demonstrators to court on December 19 charging them with unlawful assembly under the Hong Kong Public Order Ordinance. These people include 11 Korean farmers and workers, 1 Taiwanese student, 1 Japanese reporter and 1 mainland Chinese. The judge rejected bail out requests.

Leody De Guzman of the Bukluran ng Manggagawang Pilipino expressed fear that the Hong Kong authorities might charge the detained protesters with more serious offenses, as they await trial today.

He said that the international community will continue to closely monitor the situation of the

detainees and the actions of the Hong Kong authorities.

“We sincerely hope that the Chinese government will hear our call and release all detainees unconditionally and without pressing charges,” said De Guzman.

Filipino protesters vowed to continue their solidarity actions in the Philippines against the Chinese government until the last arrested anti-WTO protester is freed from Hong Kong jails.

P.S.

* Published on Freedom from Debt Coalition website.