

Action Alert

Stop the crackdown against migrant workers

Release Anwar Hossein, president of Migrant Trade Union

Tuesday 13 September 2005, by [KCTU](#) (Date first published: 19 May 2005).

On May 14 at 1:00 a.m. Anwar Hossain, President of the Migrant Trade Union, KCTU, was forcibly arrested by over 30 police officers, on his way home. During the process he suffered injuries to the head and the hands. He is currently detained at an immigration detention center in Chungjoo, two hours south of Seoul.

The Migrant Workers Trade Union (MTU), an affiliate of the KCTU, was formed on April 24, 2005. The MTU, which is in fact a merger of several migrant workers unions and groups in Seoul, Incheon, Kyongido, is an effort by migrant workers in South Korea to organize and fight for their rights. The roots of MTU can be found in the Equality Migrant Workers Trade Union Branch formed in 2001, to address discrimination and labor abuses suffered by migrant workers and the unjust immigration policy of the South Korean government.

HISTORY OF THE MIGRANT WORKERS TRADE UNION

In April 2002, over 1000 migrant workers protested against the South Korean government's unfair immigration policy in several rallies and demonstrations. As a part of this campaign the Equality Migrant Workers Trade Union Branch (ETUMB) conducted a sit-down demonstration in front of Myongdeung Cathedral for 77 days and two key leaders of the ETUMB carried out a hunger strike at the Hwa Sung immigration detention center after they were arrested for labor activities.

On July 31, 2003, the South Korean government passed a new migrant worker management system, entitled, the Act on Employment of Foreign Laborers or otherwise known as the Employment Permit System (EPS). The law, which took into effect on August 2004, along with the Industrial Trainee System is basically South Korean's version of a slave system. According to the new law, migrant workers can work in South Korea for only three years and for only one employer. Since migrant workers cannot change their work place, the employer basically has complete control over the wages and working conditions of migrant workers; thus these workers are bound to the employer like slaves. The ETUMB and other migrant workers were outraged by the South Korean government's actions thus they conducted a sit-down demonstration in front of Myongdeung Cathedral from November 15, 2003 to November 28, 2004.

Through these actions, migrant workers who were "invisible and voiceless" were finally able to have their issues to the forefront of South Korean society. More importantly, it led to the formation of the Migrant Trade Union, an independent union organized and lead by migrant workers.

CRACKDOWN AGAINST MIGRANT WORKERS

From the beginning, the South Korean government refused to recognize the Migrant Workers Trade Union (MTU) and publicly announced that the MTU could not have the three basic labor rights---the right to organize, the right to strike, and the right to collective bargaining. In addition, the South Korean government launched an all-out campaign to repress the MTU. During a press conference

held by the MTU to announce its formation, immigration officials secretly videotaped the proceedings in an effort to specifically target migrant workers participating in the MTU. Clearly, the arrest of President Hossain is a direct attempt by the South Korean government to repress the MTU and crackdown against migrant workers in South Korea.

The recent repression by the South Korean government is not new. The government has consistently targeted migrant workers activists who have been arrested and deported. In 2003, many migrant workers were labeled as “terrorists” and forcibly deported. Sam Thapa, a key leader of the ETUMB and the Myongdeung sit-down demonstration was “kidnapped” in broad day light by immigration officials and deported in an effort to stop the mobilization efforts by migrant worker.

Like all workers in South Korea, migrant workers should be treated with dignity and respect. Migrant workers should be guaranteed the same fundamental labor rights that are enjoyed by native workers. Despite the government crackdown and threats of deportation, the MTU will continue to organize and fight for the rights of migrant workers. On behalf of more than 400,000 workers in South Korea the MTU calls on the South Korean government to stop the crackdown against migrant workers and recognize the labor rights of migrant workers.

Stop the Crackdown Against Migrant Workers!

Release Anwar Hossain, President of the MTU!

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Please send protest letters to President Roh Moo Hyun at the Blue House: 82-2-770-1690 (Fax) or e-mail at president.cwd.go.kr

You can also send letters to the Minister of Justice, fax : +82-2-2110-3079

Please send copies of letters to the KCTU and MTU at inter.kctu.org and migrant.jinbo.net