

Media Advisory

Solidarity Actions to be Conducted in over Forty Cities in Thirty Countries to Support South Korean Workers, as part of the KCTU's International Day of Action on November 15th

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KOREAN CONFEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS (KCTU)

On Wednesday, November 15, 2006, trade unions, labor rights groups, and other civil society organizations in over thirty countries such as Australia, Sweden, Germany, Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand, United States, Canada, Brazil, and South Africa will be coordinating a series of actions to support the workers in South Korea. These solidarity actions were called by the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) as part of their International Day of Action to support South Korean workers Campaign.

This campaign is an effort to bring the international spotlight to South Korea once again because in the past few years, the repression against trade unionists, specifically members of the Korean Government Employees Union (KGEU), the Korean Federation of Construction Industry Trade Unions, and irregular workers has increased. The KCTU is also calling on the South Korean government to implement the recommendations made by the Committee of Freedom of Association of the ILO earlier this March and to reform South Korean labor laws to meet international standards as the government had promised to do so when it joined the OECD ten years ago.

A representative of the new international, International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), will go to the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Korea in Geneva on November 15th along with representatives from the Global Union Federations to present the views and concerns of the international trade union movement about the government's lack of respect for fundamental workers' rights.

Hans Engelberts, General Secretary of Public Service International proclaimed his wholehearted support for the International Day of Action, as they have been in the forefront of the international campaign to stop the South Korean government's harsh efforts to destroy the KGEU, an affiliate of PSI. He stated, "10 years ago the South Korean government promised both in the OECD and the ILO to start changing the law to make it in accordance with international standards. It is taking the government a long time and we're still not happy with the way it is being implemented. In fact, we condemn the way the government is, at the moment, treating the Korean Government Employees' Union." Engelberts expressed the full support of PSI, as he pledged, "We certainly will take an active part on the 15th of November, on the international day of action, and we will continue putting pressure on the Korean government that in the end, the laws must be changed in accordance with what is internationally acceptable."

"We are completely in support of the workers in South Korea to exercise their fundamental basic

rights,” stated Anita Normark, General Secretary of the Building and Wood Workers International (BWI). She continued, “BWI will be mobilizing our membership that includes 12 million workers in 135 countries to conduct actions in front of the South Korean consulate or embassy in their country or protest letters to the South Korean government to immediately stop the repression against workers. This is a critical day for us since the majority of the workers imprisoned are members of the KFCITU, an affiliate of BWI. We will not stop until they are all released.”

The International Metalworkers’ Federation(IMF) has also sent the protest letter to President, Roh Moo-Hyun on October 25th, which stated “The IMF strongly condemns these serious violations of the principle of freedom of association and human rights, and urges You, Mr. President, to use all Your efforts and influence to improve industrial relations in the region, and to stop repressions against the KGEU and the KFCITU, to release all imprisoned trade unionists and remove all arrest warrants against workers for their engaging in trade union activities, and ensure respect of the basic fundamental labour rights for irregular workers. The IMF will continue to monitor the situation until the situation is improved.”

Workers in South Africa will be also supporting the KCTU. Willy Madisha, President of the Congress of South African Trade Unions, stated, “We will go out to organize some solidarity strikes in South Africa because we believe the workers of Korea are right, and we have seen that the workers of Korea have been able to rise, in defense of their rights and the rights they are defending are the rights not only for the workers of Korea, but the workers of the world.”

It should be noted that the International Day of Action is taking place on the same day that the KCTU has called for a four-hour “Warning General Strike”. Should the government fail to address the key concerns of the KCTU—such as to stop repression against trade union activities, to implement the ILO recommendations, to guarantee basic labor rights for irregular workers and repeal the government-proposed bill on irregular workers rights, and to repeal the current Industrial Relations Roadmap Agreement and replace it with laws that meet international standards, then the KCTU will launch a full-out General Strike on November 22. On this day, movements from all sectors of South Korean society will convene in a mass mobilization to call on the South Korean government to seriously the needs of workers and peasants.

In preparation for the upcoming strike, around forty thousand workers convened in Seoul City Hall in downtown hall to participate in the KCTU’s annual National Workers Rally in commemoration of Chun Tae Il--a martyr who is recognized for giving birth to the modern democratic labor movement in South Korea. At the Rally, Jo Jun Ho, President of the KCTU stated, “We have called on the government to meet with us to seriously address our concerns; however, the government refuses to do so. Instead, the government has chosen to isolate us and portray us as a militant organization when all we are doing is asking the government to stop arresting our members from exercising their basic trade union rights such as the right to organize, to strike, and to collective bargaining. These are rights that are guaranteed and honored by the international community. On November 15, the international community will be on the side of South Korean workers.”

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