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ITUC OnLine

New ITUC Report on Violations of Trade Union Rights

Special focus on seven countries at risk for trade unionists and trade union rights: Zimbabwe, Swaziland, Guatemala, Burma, Fiji, Georgia and Bahrain

Brussels, 12 June 2013 (ITUC OnLine): Unemployment rates and income inequality are increasing globally. Trade unionists continue to fight for jobs, rights and equality. This fight often costs them their jobs, and sometimes even their lives, in various parts of the world. Since 2006, the ITUC, the largest and most democratic social movement of the world, has been monitoring violations of trade union rights. This report points at key findings in 87 countries with a special focus on seven countries where the existence of trade unions and other democratic institutions are under extreme risk: Burma/Myanmar, Bahrain, Fiji, Guatemala, Swaziland, Zimbabwe and Georgia.

According to the ITUC report, despite international legal instruments that protect and promote freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, unions and their members are still exposed to severe violations of their rights. Unions are increasingly under attack, fighting to maintain the ability to effectively promote and defend the interests of workers.

In more than half of the countries surveyed, workers have been dismissed or otherwise subjected to discrimination because of their trade union membership. The report includes detailed information on physical violence committed against trade unionists for their trade union activity in 24 countries. For example, 18 trade unionists were murdered in Colombia in 2012, and at least four already this year. Two workers were killed by police in Sierra Leone for protesting for better working conditions in mines in January 2013. Collective bargaining has been severely weakened in countries with strong industrial relations such as Portugal, Greece, Romania, Spain and Italy. In 28 of the countries surveyed, the report examines the arrest and detention of workers for their trade union membership and activities. Ninety-one members of the trade union KESK (22 women and 69 men) are still in detention in Turkey.

Guatemala has become the most dangerous country in the world for trade unionists. Since 2007, at least 53 union leaders and representatives have been killed, and there have been numerous acts of attempted murder, torture, kidnapping, break-ins and death threats, which have created a culture of fear and violence where the exercise of trade union rights becomes impossible.

Trade unionists in Africa's last absolute monarchy, Swaziland, are calling for the election of a democratic and accountable government in 2013 and have therefore been targeted by the King and the authorities. The only national centre, the Trade Union Congress of Swaziland, was de-registered in April 2012, and six trade union leaders were arrested in May 2013.

In Fiji, the military regime is trying to strengthen its illegitimate power at the expense of workers' rights. Trade unionists are excluded from bringing the voice of workers into the political debate by decree which prohibits them from expressing support for political parties.

"Hundreds of millions of working people, in developing and in industrialised countries, are denied the fundamental rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining," said Sharan Burrow, ITUC General Secretary. "For many, especially those in precarious employment, this denial wreaks havoc on their lives, as they work extremely long

hours in hazardous or unhealthy situations with incomes so low that they are unable to support themselves and their households properly. Lack of respect for workers' rights has increased inequality around the world, and that inequality helped trigger the global economic crisis and stand in the way of recovery."

An online website with constant updates on trade union rights violations will become publicly available in October 2013.

Read the whole report here: <http://www.ituc-csi.org/countries-at-risk-2013-report-on>

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