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China

Global unions demand release of labour activists

- News from around the world -

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IndustriALL Global Union and other global unions demand the Chinese government to free detained labour activists in Chinese province Guangdong, stop suppressing labour and civil society organisations, and respect the fundamental labour rights enshrined in ILO Conventions.

IndustriALL has written to President Xi Jinping of the People's Republic of China, protesting against the crackdown against labour activists. On 21 December, IndustriALL and IUF delivered a message to the Chinese mission in Geneva, Switzerland, on behalf of the global unions and ITUC.

At least four labour NGOs have been targeted by the Chinese authorities since 3 December 2015 in a crackdown in the southern province of Guangdong. 25 NGO staff and volunteers have been detained and questioned by police. One of the accusations was "assembling crowds to disturb public order".

Seven activists either remain detained or cannot be contacted. These include Panyu Workers' Centre director Zeng Feiyang and staff member Zhu Xiaomei, Foshan Nanfeiyuan Social Work Services Organization director He Xiaobo, labour activists Peng Jiayong, Deng Xiaoming, Meng Han, and Tang Jian.

Four individuals - Zeng Feiyang, He Xiaobo, Zhu Xiaomei and Deng Xiaoming are confirmed as being in detention. The labour activists have been denied any contacts with their lawyers and access to documents related to their cases.

The labour centres have been promoting workers' rights and providing services to workers for years. They have assisted workers to resolve labour conflicts and offered legal advice to workers injured at work, or with wage arrears, neglected severance pay and social contributions. Despite the positive role played by the labour NGOs, local authorities have, during the past three years, intimidated and detained their activists, revoked licences and forced some to relocate.

In his letter to President Xi Jinping, IndustriALL general secretary Jyrki Raina wrote:

"IndustriALL calls on your government to free immediately all the detained labour activists, stop suppressing labour and civil society organisations, protect the freedom of civil society as prescribed by China's Constitution, and respect the freedom of association and other fundamental labour rights enshrined in the Conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO)."

"We are aware that the continued slowdown in Guangdong's manufacturing industries has led to an increase in worker protests, as factories close down and bosses run off without paying their workers' wages. These workers need all the necessary help from your government, the ACFTU and labour NGOs. Failing to provide help and acting against people who want to support the workers will only lead to more unrest," Raina added.

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