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HTUR/FW

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80 union leaders arrested during peaceful demonstration, two workers killed in separate incident

Dear Mr. Prime Minister,

The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), which represents 168 million workers through its 311 affiliates in 155 countries and territories, including Nepal, strongly protests against the excessive violence used by the Nepali police against peaceful protesters on Wednesday 3 September. It also condemns in the strongest possible terms the killing of two workers of Narayani Rolling Mills, in the Bara District, a couple of days before. The ITUC emphatically deplores both events as unacceptable for a newly established democracy like Nepal.

Mr. **Kebal Raut** and Mr. **Krishna Yadav**, both employed at Narayani Rolling Mills, were shot by the police when they tried to hand over a package of workers' demands to the company management. They were both active members of the Nepali Factory Workers' Union (NFWU), an affiliate of the ITUC-affiliated Nepal Trade Union Congress – Independent (NTUC-I). The NFWU was engaged in collective bargaining talks with the company management. When the workers, with both NFWU members among them, tried to approach management in order to hand over their demands, the police suddenly intervened and started blindly firing shots at them, killing both Mr. Raut and Mr. Yadav, and seriously injuring about 50 other workers.

On 3 September, the police arrested no less than 80 union leaders during a peaceful protest in Kathmandu. One of them was Mr. **Santosh Rayamajhi**, General Secretary of the United Telecom Ltd (UTL) workers' trade union. The union had organised a rally in support of its demands for an end to the system of temporary contracts for the workers, for better working conditions, and for the true application of Nepal's labour and trade union laws.



The unionists were arrested in a very aggressive and brutal way, and many of them were injured. Some of them were even wounded by bullets, including a number of women. Among those injured were **Sundar K.C., Suman Rayamajhi, Subodharaj Tiwari, Dor Bahadur Bodhathoki, Santosh Adhikari, Bikram Basnet, Sushil Aryal, Nira Kshetri, Kabila Regmi, Saraswati Thapa, Saraswati Niraula, Lokmani Maskey, and Sushil Maharjan**. All detainees were held at Mahendra police station, on Exhibition Road in Kathmandu, to be released only in the evening. As we write, protest actions are continuing: the UTL workers are demonstrating in front of the Ministry of Labour.

Mr. Prime Minister, while the ITUC is fully aware of the many difficulties Nepal has been going through during the past few years, and is genuinely pleased to note that at last the situation has somehow settled down a bit, and that a democratically elected Government has been established, we do want to stress, however, that it is impossible for trade unions to exercise their right to freedom of association and collective bargaining in a climate of violence and risk to their personal security. The Government of Nepal is under an obligation to respect core labour standards, by virtue of your country's membership of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), and to provide a safe environment for trade unions to operate in. Using deadly police violence against peaceful protesters, and arresting dozens of union leaders in one go while inflicting injury on many of them, certainly doesn't qualify as good practice. It is of great importance that the tone set at the beginning of a new era for Nepal is a positive one.

The ITUC hereby adds its voice to that of the NTUC-I in requesting your Government to ensure that Nepali police forces refrain from this kind of excessive violence against peaceful demonstrators in the future. We also call on you and your Government to see to it that adequate compensation is provided to the families of the deceased workers, and that the necessary arrangements are made for an adequate treatment of those injured. Finally, we urge you to see to it that the workers' demands are met.

Yours sincerely,

General Secretary