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President of the Republic
Blue House,
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HTUR/JS

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KCTU leadership legal persecution

Dear Mr. President,

The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), which represents more than 168 million workers through its 311 affiliates in 155 countries and territories, including your own, would like to protest against the legal prosecution of Lee Yong Shik, General Secretary and Jin Young Ok, First Vice President of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU).

The ITUC already protested against the charges made against them earlier this year. At that time, the KCTU had initiated a general strike and one of the demands was calling for the renegotiations of the April 18th Protocol on importation of U.S. beef. Both Lee and Jin were released on bail after they were arrested under charges of “obstruction of business” provision in section 314 of the Penal Code due to their role in the July 2nd General Strike. It should be noted that Lee Suk Haeng, President of the KCTU is still in “hiding” as an arrest warrant was also issued against him with the same charges.

We have also been informed that the First Vice President Jin’s next trial date is scheduled for today 26 November and that General Secretary Lee’s trial is to take place on 12 December.

We regret that the Prosecutor and the Ministry of Labour declared that the strike was illegal on the grounds that the strike did not specifically focus on issues related to wages and working conditions. It is the clear jurisprudence of the ILO Committee on Freedom of Association that “organizations responsible for defending workers’ socio-economic and occupational interests should be able to use strike action to support their position in search for solutions to problems posed by major social and economic policy trends which have a direct impact on their members on workers in general, in particular as regards employment, social protection and standards of living.”

The Korean government has on several occasions made commitments to respect international labour standards, and is as a member of the ILO obliged to respect the principle of freedom of association as enshrined in ILO Convention no. 87 on freedom of association and the right to organise.

We urge you to impress upon the Prosecutor and the Ministry of Justice that they must respect international obligations undertaken by the Korean government under international law and rescind the current charges against the KCTU leadership including Lee Suk-haeng(President), Jin Young Ok(First Vice-President) and Lee Yong Shik(General Secretary). We also call on the prosecution not to revoke their bail during the trial hearing.

We will continue to monitor the situation in Korea closely and trust that you will pay prompt attention to this very serious matter.

Yours sincerely,

General Secretary