

João Antonio Felicio

President
Président
Präsident
Presidente

Sharan Burrow

General Secretary
Secrétaire générale
Generalsekretärin
Secretaria General

To: Mr. Hwang Kyo-ahn
Prime minister and acting President of Republic
of Korea

Korean Embassy in Brussels
Chaussee de la Hulpe 173-175

1170 Brussels

Belgium

E-mail : eukorea@mofa.go.kr

HTUR/JB

20 December 2016

Conviction of Han Sang-gyun, President of Korean Confederation of Trade Unions

Dear Prime Minister,

I am writing to you on behalf of the International Trade Union Confederation, representing 181 million workers in 162 countries, including in Korea, to strongly condemn the three-year prison sentence issued against Han Sang-gyun, President of Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) by the Seoul Appeal Court on 13 December 2016.

The conviction upholds charges against Han for having led a series of legitimate protest assemblies in 2015, including a November 14 2015 rally in Seoul in which 100,000 demonstrators were met with tear gas and water cannon used by some 20,000 police. Regrettably, Han is not the only trade unionist facing criminal prosecution for legitimate activities. Hundreds of union leaders and activists have been charged and six are in prison, including Cho Sung-deok, Vice President of Korean Public Service and Transport Workers' Union and President of Trucksol, Park Won-ho. An arrest warrant has been pending against the Secretary General of KCTU, Lee Young-joo for more than one year.

Charging and sentencing trade unionists for organizing and participating in public protests constitute blatant violations of the right to freedom of association. The ILO Committee on Freedom of Association has made it clear that depriving trade unionists of their freedom on grounds related to their trade union activity represents an obstacle to the exercise of trade union rights. Indeed, Maina Kiai, the UN Special Rapporteur on Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association stated in relation to Han's case that the *decision to charge participants with serious offence of general obstruction of traffic, conveys a desire by the authorities to discourage assemblies.*

We regret that despite the impeachment and suspension of President Park Guen-hye, your government continues to criminalise trade unionists instead of engaging in a meaningful dialogue over the enormous challenges workers are facing in Korea.

Dialogue and consultation with trade unionists and civil society organization is also critical to overcoming the current political crisis. Therefore, we strongly urge you to immediately withdraw all civil and criminal charges that are related to the organization and participation in legitimate trade union activities as a matter of priority.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'A. B.' followed by a stylized flourish.

General Secretary