
Solidarity with Korean trade unionists
Global trade union campaign
October 2010

TUC calls on Korea to respect international labour standards

The TUC has joined an international campaign to press the South Korean government to honour its international commitments on core labour standards and respect for workers' rights, as the G20 gathers in Seoul from 11-12 November.

When Korea took a seat at the international global table for economic development in 1996 it made a commitment to reform its labour laws and meet international standards on workers' rights.

Fourteen years later, Korean laws still do not comply with international standards on protecting workers' rights and Korea is one of the worst countries in the world for the repression of its workers, trade unions and people.

The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) has called on unions around the world to take action in their workplaces, streets, cyberspace and airways and visiting Korean embassies in solidarity with Korean workers as part of the campaign. To support this action, the ITUC and Global Union Federations have released a series of campaign resources, including [posters](#), [stickers](#), [leaflets](#) and a [government briefing note](#).

TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber has sent the following letter to the South Korean Ambassador in London.

HE Dr Yoon-Je Cho
Ambassador
Embassy of the Republic of Korea
60 Buckingham Gate
London SW1E 6AJ

Dear Ambassador

The TUC joins with the global trade union movement in calling for the Korean government to honour its international commitments on core labour standards and respect for workers' rights.

Repeatedly workers and trade unions in Korea are subject to violations of human and trade union rights. The number of arrests and severity of prison sentences as well as physical violence is increasing.

When Korea joined the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 1996 it was on the proviso that your government would take the necessary measures to bring Korea's labour law in line with international standards.

Yet Korea has failed to adhere to or ratify ILO conventions no. 87 (right to freedom of association) and no. 98 (right to collective bargaining) and your government has repeatedly refused offers of technical assistance from the International Labour Organisation to bring your legislation into line with international standards.

The Korean Government routinely uses criminal sanctions under Article 314 of the criminal code to arrest and imprison trade unionists for exercising their legitimate right to conduct trade union activities.

Korean law denies workers in precarious or irregular employment the right to join a trade union and bargain collectively. Employers systematically engage workers on precarious employment contracts specifically to prevent them from forming and joining trade unions.

Public sector workers are subjected to anti-union discrimination and disciplinary measures and their collective agreements are unilaterally cancelled by the Government. Whole categories of Government workers are prevented from organising through an overly broad definition of "essential services".

We call on the Korean government to honour its international commitments and respect workers' rights.

Yours sincerely

BRENDAN BARBER

General Secretary