

A Labour Start Campaign

Georgia: Strike-breaking, union-busting, forced labour

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A Labour Start campaign in partnership with the International Trade Union Confederation, which represents 175 million workers in 151 countries and territories and has 305 national affiliates.

Georgian workers continue to experience severe trade union repression at the hands of both the employer and the government. The latest attack comes at Hercules Steel, a Georgian-Indian joint venture in Kutaisi, Georgia. Workers formed a trade union on 4 August 2011. However, the employer refused to recognize the union and fired six leaders. As the employer refused to seek a negotiated solution, workers had no option but to strike, some going on a hunger strike. On 15 September, the governor and 50 police vehicles stormed the plant and arrested 40 workers. Immediately after the strikers were dispersed, the police and management representatives called and visited workers demanding that they return to work under penalty of arrest. The police also forced detained workers to sign statements promising not to protest and to return to work immediately. In addition to the industrial conflict, information has emerged that over 100 Indian migrant workers have had their passports withheld and have been forced to live in squalid living conditions. Wages and working conditions are very poor. Workers wanting to leave in advance of the expiration of their contract have not been allowed to leave. We are urging the Georgian government to intervene in this matter to ensure the domestic and international labour rights of Georgian and Indian workers are fully respected.

Letter

I am deeply troubled by the egregious violations of human and trade union rights at Hercules Steel in Kutaisi Georgia. The dismissal of trade union officers and founding members is a clear and serious violation of the international right to freedom of association. Similarly, the refusal to bargain with a legally constituted trade union is an unambiguous violation of the right to organize and collective bargain. A role for the government in this situation should have been to attempt to mediate the dispute. Instead, local government not only condoned this illegal activity but actually furthered its objectives through the use of police power. We are also deeply disturbed by the reports of that over 100 Indian workers may have been subjected to forced labour and trafficking. Unfortunately, this case is only one of many serious violations committed by employers and the government in Georgia in recent years. I urge the government to bring an end to these violations and to commit itself to uphold the rights enshrined in the ILO Declaration of Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, as

well as the ILO conventions which it has ratified.

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