

IndustriALL launches campaign for health and safety in Pakistan mines

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Ten IndustriALL Global Union affiliates are urging the government of Pakistan to ratify ILO Convention 176 (C176) on Safety and Health in Mines. This follows a decision by IndustriALL's Executive Committee in November 2017, for a global campaign to end fatalities in Pakistani mines.

The campaign aims to ensure a sustainable solution to Pakistan's dependence on coal at the expense of the health, safety and lives of mineworkers. IndustriALL is calling on the government to ratify the ILO convention and commit to implementing the regulatory and legislative framework according to international standards.

The launch of the campaign at a press conference in Islamabad on 13 March, comes just one day after another death at a Baluchistan coal mine, highlighting the safety crisis in the country's mines. Coal miner Afzal Khan died when earth collapsed at a mine in the Sharigh coal field.

According to credible sources, since January 2010, at least 275 miners have been killed, while there is limited data on the number injured.

Speaking at the press conference, IndustriALL assistant general secretary Kemal Özkan, said:

We are extremely concerned over continuing fatal accidents in Pakistani mines.

Pakistan isn't a major mining country in terms of the volume of production and export, but it is a world champion in death and injury. We cannot accept this. We need to stand up and fight to change to protect mine workers in the country.

The government of Pakistan should immediately ratify and implement international conventions and practices on mining. Genuine tripartite initiatives should be taken with the participation of government, employers and mine workers to provide safety and health information, training and consultations and involve workers to deal with mining hazards.

Rich in many mineral resources, Pakistan, like many global south mineral-rich countries, is struggling to leverage resources for equitable development.

The unregulated nature of Pakistan's coal mining industry with its fragmented ownership structure, illegal ownership of mines, lack of implementation of national laws and regulation on health and safety, overburdened mining inspectorate and very low density of union membership, are possible reasons to the deteriorating health and safety situation.

IndustriALL met with Pakistan's labour minister Dr Hashim Popalzai, federal secretary of the department of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resources Development, to urge the government of Pakistan to ratify and implement the Convention.

Dr Popalzai acknowledged the health and safety problem, and committed his ministry to support ratification. Safety and labour law in Pakistan is devolved to provincial level, and the provisions of C176 would need to be incorporated into provincial law. According to Dr Popalzai, Pakistan's problem is not a lack of adequate law, but a weakness in inspection, implementation and education.

IndustriALL also met with ILO country director Ingrid Christensen, to seek support for awareness raising and training in coal mining areas.

IndustriALL met with officials of state-owned Pakistan Minerals Development Corporation (PMDC), which controls about 20 per cent of Pakistan's salt and coal mines. This proportion has decreased dramatically since privatization began in 1997. Local unions oppose privatization and consider PMDC as the benchmark for safety standards. However, PMDC faces competition from a fragmented private mining sector not respecting the law, and with an increasing use of contractors instead of permanent employees.

The campaign is supported by all affiliated trade unions in various sectors, recognizing the contribution that ratifying C176 will have on safety culture. Assessments on existing health and safety laws and regulations and their enforcement continue, and affiliates will develop a strategy to maximize support and minimize opposition to the ratification of C176 by lobbying government and legislative bodies. There will be actions in awareness raising, capacity building, communication and mobilization of workers.

IndustriALL

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* 15.03.2018:

<http://www.industrialunion.org/industrial-launches-campaign-for-health-and-safety-in-pakistan-mines>

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