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ITUC

November 30, 2016

His Excellency Mr Kyong-Lim Choi
Ambassador Extraordinary and
Plenipotentiary
Permanent Representative
Avenue de l'Ariana 1
1211 Geneva 20

Re: KCTU General Strike in South Korea

His Excellency:

We are writing to you to express our deep solidarity and support for the General Strike being taken by the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) in South Korea today (30 November 2016).

We note the decision on 20 November of South Korean prosecutors to investigate President Park Geun-hye as a suspect in a growing political corruption scandal, despite her political immunity under the Korean Constitution. This has resulted in enormous response from South Korean civil society, and the country has been rocked by its largest protests since the June Democracy Movement of 1987 which ended almost 30 years of military rule. It is estimated that on 12 November a million people made their way onto the streets of Seoul, demanding Park step down. An international Global Unions delegation participated in these events expressing our solidarity and support to the current struggle for labour rights, human rights, and justice.

However, for the trade unions in South Korea and their international allies this struggle is about much more than the present corruption scandal. For two years the South Korean trade unions have bravely resisted the Park Government's neoliberal labour reforms – designed to cut wages and make work more insecure – through mass actions that have threatened the Government's political agenda. The Park Government has responded with a furious attack on the trade union movement, making hundreds of politically-motivated arrests and threatening union leaders and activists with incarceration. This includes members of our affiliate unions and Han Sang Gyun, President of the KCTU who as you know is serving a five-year prison sentence on charges of "obstruction" for organising a protest of 100,000 people in November 2015 against the labour reforms.

To this day over twenty trade unionists still languish in South Korean prisons, while many more are defending their right to freedom of expression and their trade union rights in the courts. In January this year the UN Special Rapporteur Maina Kiai noted a "gradual regression on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association", highlighting concerns about workers' rights to organize, the outlawing of particular unions and undue restrictions on the right to strike. Kiai has since called for a full and independent investigation into the management of assemblies, in particular police use of water cannons and bus barricades.



We therefore wish to express our support and solidarity to the calls of the mass movement that has called for President Park Geun-hye to resign for her corrupt actions and her attacks on workers' rights. We also demand the immediate release of all imprisoned trade unionists, the cessation of legal action against those still facing political prosecutions or other legal proceedings and an immediate end to the attacks on the trade union movement.

On behalf of the Council of Global Unions,

Sincerely,



Ambet Yuson
General Secretary
BWI



Valter Sanches
General Secretary
IndustriALL



Ron Oswald
General Secretary
IUF



Rosa Pavanelli
General Secretary
PSI



Philip Jennings
General Secretary
UNI