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Joint statement of Global Union Federations

30 November 2016

End Attacks on South Korean Trade Unions Now

We the undersigned General Secretaries of the Global Unions representing more than 200 million workers express our deep support and solidarity for the General Strike called by the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU), and condemn in the strongest possible terms the full-fledged attacks on trade union leaders and political and social activists for simply doing their jobs in fighting for labour rights, human rights, and justice.

We are united with the mass movement taking shape in South Korea demanding that President Park Geun Hye immediately and unconditionally step down from public office. We have been shocked at the contempt shown to the South Korean people in the recent corruption scandal involving Park and her close associates.

However, our criticism of President Park goes further than the current crisis. For the last two years, trade unions in South Korea have been engaged in a bitter struggle to resist the Park Government's neoliberal labour reforms, designed to lower wages and make work more insecure. This resistance has been met with a cowardly attack on the labour movement, simply for pursuing their democratic rights.

We are seriously concerned with the rollback of rights that has occurred over the last couple of years, reminding many Korean workers of the military dictatorship era. Hundreds of trade unionists have been arrested and many subjected to arbitrary political prosecutions including Han Sang-Gyun, President of the KCTU. Han is currently 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 and growing youth unemployment. In addition, a number of trade union offices have been ransacked and unions stripped of their legal status. These grave violations of human and trade union rights are simply an attempt to hold on to power by a Government that has lost the legitimacy of the South Korean people.

We echo the demands of trade unions and the South Korean people for President Park to resign. Further, we demand the immediate release of all jailed trade unionists, the cessation of all legal action against trade union officials and activists, and an immediate end to the attacks on the trade union movement. Working people in South Korea need a voice, not to be attacked.