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2010-08-30
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Ms. Sheikh Hasina Wajed
Office of the Prime Minister
Gano Bhaban, Sher-e Bangla Nagar
Dhaka
Bangladesh

Intimidation and harassment of the Bangladesh Center for Worker Solidarity

Dear Prime Minister,

I am writing on behalf of the Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO), representing 1.6 million union members, to protest against intimidation and harassment of the Bangladesh Center for Worker Solidarity (BCWS).

I have been informed by the International Trade Union Confederation that on July 30, several criminal charges were filed against Ms. Kalpona Akter, Mr. Babul Akhter, and Mr. Aminul Islam of the BCWS, and that their family members have been harassed and threatened with violence by police officers. We understand that Ms. Kalpona Akter and Mr. Aminul Islam were arrested on 12 August 2010.

It is reported that BCWS leaders have been accused of inciting worker unrest. However, BCWS is an internationally known and well respected advocate for workers' rights. Also it is reported that cases have been filed against other worker leaders including Montu Ghosh, Mahbub Islam, Bazlur Rashid Feruz, Moshrefa Mishu, Sultan Bahar, Nasim Nasrin, Ruhul Amin and Abul Hossain and that several had to go into hiding.

LO-Sweden understands that they have been charged in connection with demonstrations against the new minimum wage proposal announced on 29 July and that many other labour leaders and strike participants were arrested or have had arrest warrants issued against them. Some say that at least 5,000 workers have been dismissed for involvement in the protests.

Police has reportedly confirmed that 20 people, including 7 women, have been arrested since the beginning of August, and that they had opened files on "several thousand" workers. Some reports claim that at least 100 workers have been arrested and files have been opened against 12,000 workers.

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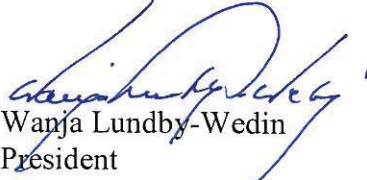
The Swedish Trade Union Confederation

Targeting trade unions and labour rights organisations for defending the legitimate demands of garment workers for higher minimum wages is against the right to freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining. Your government is under an obligation to refrain from such action under ILO Conventions C 87 and 98, ratified by Bangladesh.

I urge you to ensure the withdrawal of criminal charges of fomenting labour unrest filed against labour rights advocates and worker organisers, including Ms Kalpona Akter, Mr. Babul Akhter and Mr. Aminul Islam of the BCWS. It also urges you to immediately release all those imprisoned and withdraw arrest warrants issued against all other labour leaders or workers for exercising their fundamental rights, and guarantee their personal safety while in detention.

I thank you for your urgent attention to this matter.

THE SWEDISH TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (LO)


Wanja Lundby-Wedin
President