

Tuesday 15 February 2011

Australian unions join global action calling for workers' rights in Mexico

The global trade union movement launched six days of global action calling for trade union rights in Mexico at the Australian Workers' Union's National Conference today, February 15, 2011.

"The Mexican government must end its campaign of political persecution against independent and democratic unions in Mexico," said Jyrki Raina, the General Secretary of the International Metalworkers' Federation (IMF), speaking to the assembly of over 300 unionists gathered in Queensland.

Trade unions around the world affiliated to the IMF, the International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers' Unions (ICEM), the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF), UNI Global Union and the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) are taking action in support of the Mexican Miners' Union and the other independent unions in Mexico.

Working alongside the global unions, the trade union website LabourStart has launched an e-mail campaign to support the Mexico Days of Action. Unions in Australia and around the globe are calling on members to participate.

Calling for trade union rights in Mexico, the global days of action are taking place from February 14 to 19, which coincide with the fifth anniversary of the deaths of 65 miners at the Pasta de Conchos mine disaster in Mexico on February 19, 2006.

"Instead of attempting to rescue the miners at Pasta de Conchos and investigate the cause of the disaster, over the last five years the Mexican government has escalated its illegal and violent attacks on the Mexican Miners' Union for demanding justice, improved health and safety and the recovery of the miners' bodies," Raina said.

Speaking in support of the global unions' demands for trade union rights in Mexico, Paul Howes, AWU National Secretary, spoke of the essential role that trade unions have played in Australia's history in improving health and safety in the mining industry, something workers in every country have a right to.

"For a national government to go on the attack against a union that is legitimately and responsibly defending the rights of its members to a safe workplace and to be represented by a union of their choice is deplorable," said Howes.

In Australia, the ACTU is coordinating a rally at the nation's Parliament House in Canberra on Friday 18 February. The rally will be addressed by ACTU President Ged Kearney and other senior Australian and international union leaders.

For further information, please contact:

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MEXICO

DAYS OF ACTION

14-19 February 2011

Background on the global day of action

The Mexican Miners' Union (SNTMMSRM), the Mexican Electrical Workers' Union (SME), the UNTyPP union representing workers in Mexico's state-owned petroleum company PEMEX, the National Union of General Tyre Workers of Mexico (SNTGTM) and the Mexican Telephone Workers' Union (STRM), among others, have all faced violent attacks, intimidation and repression of trade union rights.

Supporting the global action, **Sharan Burrow, ITUC General Secretary**, said "despite Mexico being signatory to international standards of labour rights, in law and practice the Mexican government breaches these standards to the detriment of the lives of working people in Mexico."

Andrew Vickers, General Secretary of CFMEU Mining & Energy Division and chair of ICEM's Global Mining Sector added trade unions will continue their international protests until the Mexican Government properly recognizes trade union rights in its country.

"The appalling behaviour of the Mexican Government, epitomized by the outrageous persecution of the Mexican Miners' Union, is intolerable and a disgrace to a country that purports to be part of a decent international community," said Vickers.

Not only are the few independent and democratic unions in Mexico under attack, Mexican workers' rights are systematically violated through the extensive use of employer-dominated "protection contracts" entered into by numerous global companies without workers' knowledge or participation.

Joe de Bruyn, President of the UNI Global Union, National Secretary of SDA and Vice-President of ACTU explains, "For decades the Mexican government has facilitated low wages and suppressed worker voices through a pervasive web of employer-controlled protection contracts. We want to change the rules of the game in Mexico and ensure all workers can join the free and independent trade union movement."

When workers challenge the status quo and demand their rights they are frequently met with intimidation, violence, blacklisting and retaliation by their employers, either sanctioned by or backed up by State forces.

Paddy Crumlin, ITF President and National Secretary of MUA, said, "the incredible strength and resistance that Mexican workers show in the face of the often violent repression of their rights is extraordinary. Through these global days of action workers everywhere demonstrate our solidarity and our commitment to support Mexican workers in this struggle."

Australian unions are joined by trade unions in Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Korea, Kosovo, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Peru, Poland, Russia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom and the U.S. in calling on the Mexican government to respect trade union rights in a series of actions from 14 to 19 February 2011. In Mexico itself, the independent trade union movement will be holding a series of actions across the country to highlight the systematic abuse of trade union rights by the Mexican government.





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Together trade unions in at least 30 countries are holding rallies, meeting with Mexican government representatives, and sending letters and thousands of emails all calling on the Mexican government to:

1. Hold employer and government officials accountable for the Pasta de Conchos mine explosion that killed 65 miners on February 19, 2006.
2. Abolish systemic violations of workers' freedom of association, including employer-dominated "protection contracts" and interference in union elections.
3. End the use of force—by the state or private parties—to repress workers' legitimate demands for democratic unions, better wages and working conditions, and good health and safety conditions.
4. End the campaign of political persecution against the Mexican Miners' Union and the Mexican Electrical Workers' Union.

In Australia a rally organized by the ACTU, AWU, AMWU, CEPU; CFMEU, MUA, SDA and Unions ACT will take place at the nation's Parliament House in Canberra on Friday 18 February. The rally will be addressed by senior Australian and international union leaders.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

1. For additional information about trade union rights violations in Mexico please see: http://www.imfmetal.org/files/11012116125310005/Fact%20sheet_en.pdf
2. For additional information about the actions taking place around the world this week, go to:
 - IMF website at: www.imfmetal.org/mexico2011
 - ICEM website at: www.icem.org/en/5-Mining-DGOJP
 - UNI Global Union website at: www.uniglobalunion.org/MexicoAction
 - Twitter hashtag #mexicoaction
3. The International Metalworkers' Federation (IMF) is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland and represents the interests of 25 million metalworkers in over 100 countries around the world. www.imfmetal.org
4. The International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers' Unions (ICEM) also based in Geneva, represents 20 million workers worldwide. www.icem.org
5. The International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) represents 4.6 million transport workers in 781 unions in 155 countries. www.itfglobal.org
6. UNI Global Union represents 20 million workers belonging to 900 skills and services trade unions worldwide. www.uniglobalunion.org





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The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) represents the interests of working people worldwide. It has 301 affiliated member organizations in 151 countries and territories, with a total membership of 176 million workers. www.ituc-csi.org

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